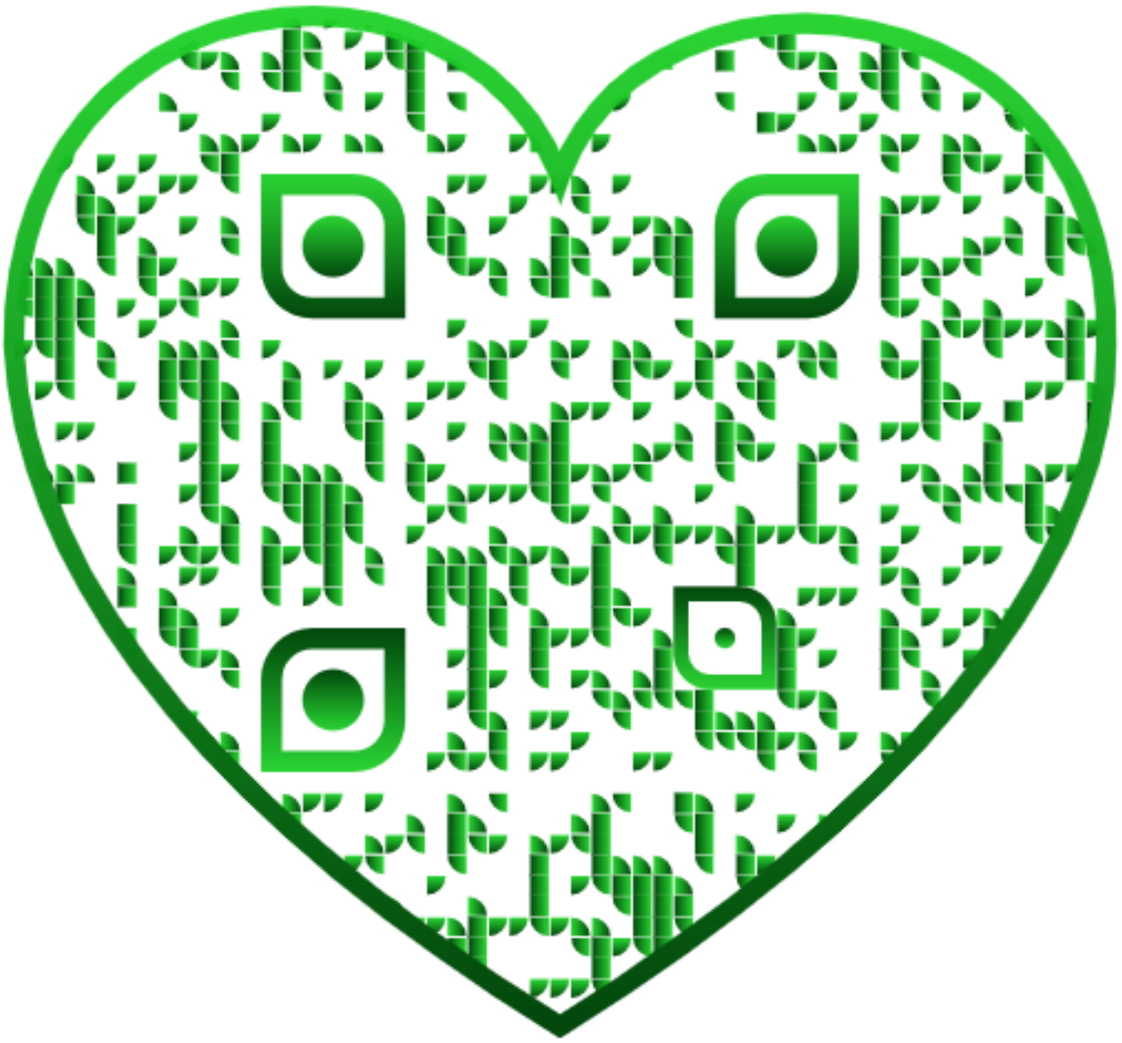
METAL HAMMER

FUTURE
ISSUE **352**



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TWO SIMPLE WORDS: SAMURAI. EDDIE.

ON JULY 15, Iron Maiden unleashed *The Writing On The Wall* onto the world, and it was official: metal's greatest band were finally releasing a brand new album – their first in six years. It marks the longest-ever gap between Maiden records, and the world in which *Senjutsu* arrives is a very, very different beast to the one that welcomed *The Book Of Souls* in 2015.

Since then, we've had the Brexit vote, Brexit itself (sigh), three different Prime Ministers, an entire Trump presidency (bigger sigh), the explosion of the Black Lives Matter movement, two Euros and a World Cup… oh, and a global pandemic (BIG FUCKING SIGH). So, the question begs: exactly what the hell does a new Iron Maiden album sound like in 2021? We were granted an exclusive interview with Bruce and Janick to find out everything you need to know about the biggest metal album of 2021, from new songs to new Eddies to what it all means for their future. Put short: get excited

As *Metal Hammer* went to press, we received the devastating news that Joey Jordison had passed away. As you read this letter, we'll be putting together a huge, no-holds-barred tribute to the legend, which will be on sale next month. His legacy will live on, and we promise to do it justice.

See you then.

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MEET THE BAND

DOM LAWSON
WRITER
Iron Maiden runs through Dom's veins (not literally, that'd be rubbish), so we sent Mr Lawson on a top-secret mission to London to hear the new record, talk to Bruce and Janick and give you the definitive look into the ultimate heavy metal event of this (or any) year.

PARIS FAWCETT
WRITER
Fist bumps and high fives to Paris for nailing her first official *Metal Hammer* feature – a big chat with the mighty Employed To Serve to dissect their fantastic new album, *Conquering*. The best young heavy band in Britain right now? You better believe it, pals.

ALI COOPER
WRITER
Big hair, great make-up and bags of personality: three things that Ali and Dee Snider have in common. So why not unite them for this month's People Vs? Sadly, Dee was too shy to offer any big opinions on anything. We're kidding, obviously. He loves this shit.

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THE BIG PICTURE

MIKE HOWE

1965-2021

***METAL HAMMER* WAS** saddened to learn of the passing of Metal Church frontman Mike Howe, who died aged 55 last month. Mike originally fronted the US heavy metallers from 1988 to 1995, rejoining the band in 2015 and continuing to front them until his death. Mike had also fronted thrash metallers Heretic. "It is with our deepest regrets that we must announce the passing of our brother, our friend and true legend of heavy metal music," Metal Church posted in a statement. "Mike Howe passed away this morning at his home in California. We are devastated and at a loss for words. Please respect our privacy and the Howe family's privacy during this most difficult time." *Metal Hammer*'s thoughts are with Mike's friends, family and bandmates.

GETTY

THE HOT TOPIC

JOEY JORDISON

1975-2021

As *Metal Hammer* went to press, news broke that would shock the metal world

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

AS *HAMMER* WENT to press this month, tragic news broke: Joey Jordison, founding member and original drummer of Slipknot, had passed away aged just 46. News first broke on the evening of Tuesday July 27, from an official statement from his family detailing that he had died peacefully in his sleep on July 26.

"Joey's death has left us with empty hearts and feelings of indescribable sorrow," the statement read. "Those that knew Joey understood his quick wit, his gentle personality, giant heart, and his love for all things family and music. The family of Joey have asked that friends, fans, and media understandably respect our need for privacy and peace at this incredibly difficult time."

Tributes soon poured in from across the rock and metal community. Joey was remembered fondly not just by his contemporaries, but by the bands he had idolised growing up and a legion more he himself had inspired. Trivium, Ministry, Ozzy Osbourne, Metallica, Hatebreed, Code Orange… the list goes on, while elsewhere journalists, fans and PRs fondly recalled how he had changed their lives.

Since first making his mark on the wider metal world as the whirlwind at the heart of the 18-legged beast that was Slipknot, Joey had established himself as a larger-than-life character in a band full of them, his enormous presence on every record he played on testament to his supreme talent behind the kit.

Not content with breaking Slipknot into the mainstream and nabbing a No.1 record with 2001's *Iowa*, playing an enormous role in normalising extreme metal in the mainstream metal lexicon in the process, Joey proved to be a prolific presence in the metal scene throughout the 2000s. In 2002 he introduced the world to Murderdolls, a horror-punk band in the vein of Misfits given a heavy metal retooling. Alongside emergent star Wednesday 13, Joey was one of the main faces in the band – unmasked but no less iconic for the fact as he showed off his multi-instrumental talents recording guitars, bass, drums, keyboards and piano variously across the record.

In 2004 he stepped up to the plate and joined Metallica for their Download Festival headline performance when drummer Lars Ulrich went AWOL. No rehearsals, no problem: Joey proved his prodigious talent along the biggest metal band on the planet, starting out with some timidness but quickly hitting a groove that saw him introducing his own incendiary style into Metallica's set. Almost 20 years later, it is telling that while Jordison was not the only drummer to fill the stool that night, he's the one that *everyone* remembered.

By 2005 there was barely a metalhead alive who didn't know who Joey Jordison was, either by name alone or due to his visage popping up on posters in bedrooms around the world. That also made him a natural choice to lead the incredibly ambitious Roadrunner United project as one of its four 'team captains'. As ever, Joey shined: pulling in everyone from Deicide's Glen Benton to Glassjaw's Daryl Palumbo and Type O Negative icon Peter Steele, he indulged his love for the metal underground by utilising some of its most under-appreciated talent.

Joey's departure from Slipknot in December 2013 was a shock, clouded with speculation and hearsay that never quite cleared up. Awarded the prestigious 'Golden God' at the 2016 *Metal Hammer* Golden God Awards, Joey opened up publicly for the first time about the split in an accompanying cover interview with *Hammer*, explaining that he had transverse myelitis, a neurological disease that had affected his nerves and motor functions, ultimately

Joey Jordison: a huge inspiration to so many

"JOEY'S DEATH HAS LEFT US WITH EMPTY HEARTS"

Joey in his iconic mask

contributing to his departure. The sheer emotion of Joey's acceptance speech at the awards ensured that every single person was moved by his words, rooting to see him continue pursuing his dreams even as he was dealt curveballs.

With Scar The Martyr, Vimic and Sinsaenum, Joey continued to explore his love for heavy metal in its many forms, a tireless devotee to the end. Joey left an indelible mark on heavy metal culture that inspired new realms of technical proficiency and showmanship, while championing the music and community in a truly passionate and earnest way. It is unsurprising that his ex-bandmates have given some of the best summations of what Joey's presence meant – as Slipknot put it: "Without him, there would be no us."

As a community, we are poorer for the loss of Joey Jordison, the man who truly earned his '#1' status. Rest in peace to a one-of-a-kind icon, prodigious talent and all-round heavy metal hero.

PICK UP NEXT'S MONTH'S *METAL HAMMER* FOR OUR SPECIAL-EDITION TRIBUTE ISSUE TO THE LIFE AND CAREER OF JOEY JORDISON

MAIN: MICK HUTSON/GETTY INSET: FUTURE

#1 REMEMBERED

Tributes for Joey flooded in from his friends and peers

"Deeply saddened to hear about the passing of Joey Jordison. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his friends, family and fans."
Ozzy Osbourne

"Rest in peace to a legend of the music world. Joey's contributions to music changed the face of heavy music on the planet as we know it."
Matt Heafy, Trivium

"Such a talented songwriter, amazing drummer, great guitar player and funny human being. Our lives intertwined so many times, man. This hurts. Way too young."
Robb Flynn, Machine Head

"Absolutely shocked & gutted to hear of the passing of Joey Jordison. In addition to being an incredible drummer, he was always a classy guy."
Mike Portnoy

"Rest in peace legend."
Code Orange

"Rest in peace Joey Jordison. You changed the game with Slipknot. Brought the blast beat to the mainstream! Gave kids a groove like no other. *Perseverance* would've never happened had it not been for Joey & the Slipknot camp."
Jamey Jasta, Hatebreed

"This is hard. I'm at a loss. My thoughts are with his family, friends, former bandmates and all the fans that loved and admired his playing."
Otep Shamaya, Otep

"Rip to the brother Joey Jordison. Love you brother."
Papa Roach

"Joey Jordison was better upside down than any other metal drummer sitting normally."
Ginger Wildheart, The Wildhearts

"We are saddened by the news of the passing of our friend Joey Jordison. A great musician and person has left us. Sending our love to his family. R.I.P."
Anthrax

WHAT'S BETTER: BROADWAY OR HEAVY METAL?

He's the Twisted Sister mastermind and all-round metal legend who notoriously refused to take it – but can he take your questions?

WORDS: ALI COOPER • PICTURES: HOLDEN JAY LEEDS

EVEN THROUGHOUT A global pandemic, Dee Snider has been as productive as ever, conjuring up a brand new solo album, *Leave A Scar*, amongst numerous other crazy projects – if you ever wanted a kids' TV show created by Dee, then you're in luck. In celebration of a jam-packed period in his creative life, we asked you lot to pick the questions for the legendary frontman.

You're an energetic person who can't stop moving or creating. Besides your upcoming album, have you gained any new skills/hobbies during COVID? Mine's the drums.
@KlaraZ84 (Twitter)

"I've not taken this time sitting down, but I can't say a new skill, I've just sharpened other ones. I've been writing my first novel, screenplays, I'm gonna be directing my first movie and I've helped create a children's show that's in development with NBC. I got a call from a producer friend asking if I wanted to work on a children's show and I said, 'Yeah, OK!' When I hung up, my wife said, 'You wanna do a children's show?!' I said, 'Well, not until I got that call!' I've got four kids and four grandchildren; I've suffered through enough shitty kids' shows for two lifetimes, so if I can help create something cool for parents to listen to and watch rather than want to shoot themselves. I'm doing God's work! I'm writing all the music for it so when it comes to fruition, I've created something that's connecting with my grandchildren! So I've sharpened new skills but I haven't picked up anything new. Does sitting under a palapa on the beach count? I didn't do a lot of that in my youth but now I've learned how to sit on a chaise longue under a palapa."

What's better: Broadway or heavy metal?
Marco LG (Facebook)

"Heavy metal hands down, no doubt about it. I really had my eyes opened when I was in *Rock Of Ages* and *Rocktopia* on Broadway and I'm involved in a new show that's currently being developed for a Broadway run. I definitely got the Broadway bug – I even did an album called *Dee Does Broadway* – but nothing will ever replace heavy metal. You face your audience in rock'n'roll but when you're in theatre, you're not supposed to acknowledge them. In *Rock Of Ages*, my character, Dennis Dupree, finds out in a soliloquy from the narrator that he dies a few years later and I look at him and go, 'I'm dead?!' One show, a guy in the front row shouted, 'Thank God!' One of the toughest moments of my life was to not acknowledge somebody saying thank God I died!"

The ego cannot be caged!

From your early music years, you seemed to have a sense that you and your band would be iconic. Was that the case?
@fateswarning86 (Twitter)

"When Twisted Sister started out and there were seven people at our first show, we had barricades in front of the stage to keep people back – there was nobody there to keep back, but I felt it was important that people realise how important we were that there had to be barricades. Oddly enough, human nature works that if you see

Dee Snider: officially
no longer an asshole

“I’M A WHORE, BUT I’M AN EXPENSIVE WHORE!”

something to keep you back, you immediately move right up to the barricade, so it was a psychological game. One of my famous pictures is of me pointing up and I was playing in these little shitty bars and people say, 'What are you pointing at?' I said, 'The top row of the arena.' In my mind, I was never in a bar, pub or a little shitty place, I was in an arena. I always joke that God gave me a head this big for arenas! I thought I was iconic in my own mind – it just took a while for people to realise."

If you were to join the Wu-Tang Clan next week, what would your Wu name be?
@StuWhoGodbomber (Twitter)
"Poon… I'd be Poon Tang!"

Do you ever envisage that a day might come when you will, in fact, relent and take it?
@SeldomGruntled (Twitter)
"A humour magazine called *The Onion* had a faux article several years ago called, 'Twisted Sister calls press conferences, they've decided they're gonna take it.' I feel in all honesty that I've taken it more times than I should have and usually it was for money; I like to say I'm a whore, but I'm an expensive whore! We once allowed *We're Not Gonna Take It* to be used for a commercial for pre-menopausal women's medication. I was mortified by the idea until they told me how much they were willing to pay. I quickly asked, 'What does it do?' They ran down the list and when they said it helps stop vaginal dryness, I thought, 'OK, I'm totally against vaginal dryness, I'm right behind this!'"

What is the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow?
@Dominic_Tyson (Twitter)
"African or European? I can't answer that question, you need to be more specific. *Monty Python* and English humour is like my Bible!"

Will the Widowmaker records ever be reissued or any of the songs played live again? I always thought that the first record was massively underrated.
@NJGalea (Twitter)
"We're trying to redo a box set on that but there's some issues with the first album. Nobody knows who owns it anymore so it's out of print and we're trying to figure out who has the rights. I've been playing a Widowmaker song in my set honouring that era for people like yourself, but I don't see a Widowmaker reunion happening. I'd just rather move forward and address new things than try to go back and recreate the past."

"I WAS A REAL ASSHOLE IN THE 80S"

There was a time this pic would've sent Manowar running… possibly

Have you always been such a nice person?
@vitevoila (Twitter)
"Ask my wife and my bandmates if I was always such a nice person! I was a real asshole in the 80s but I feel much better now! There's nothing like a good humbling to have it all taken away from you and nearly losing everything, which I did in the late 80s and early 90s. All the money was gone, the band was gone, my wife nearly left me. It woke me the fuck up."

Would you make a Manowar cover or co-operate with them?
@Pedro79866122 (Twitter)
"Very funny, Pedro! There was a time when I wanted to punch Manowar. We told them to meet us in Covent Garden and we were gonna have fisticuffs. They didn't show up because they knew I wasn't kidding. I was in my 20s, I was crazy. Would I do a Manowar cover? Probably not, even though we've patched things up and we're not enemies, but let's not get crazy, Pedro."

Is Dee going to be back on the convention circuit? His #1 fan would like to see him again.
@WihnanKeith (Twitter)
"Yes Keith, I will be going back to the convention circuit! It's a very unique opportunity to not just meet fans up close and personal and for them to meet you – it's very different to the distance you have when you're performing onstage – but also to meet other performers from all different worlds and talk to them. You find you have a lot more in common than you differ; your product may be very different but the path you're walking is very similar. I became very good friends with Billy Zabka from *Cobra Kai*, hence my guest appearance – I never would have met him if it wasn't for conventions. Reality TV's a lot like that as well and I've made a lot of friends there, whether it's Bobby Brown or Maureen McCormick from *The Brady Bunch*." H

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THE SLAYLIST

MATTHEW GREYWOLF

The guitarist of power metal kings Powerwolf digs death metal and classic cuts

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY
PICTURES: MATTEO FABBIANI VD PICTURES

Matthew Greywolf: blame Maiden. A familiar story

LISTEN NOW
Head to **tinyurl.com/GreywolfMix** to listen to Matthew's Slaylist

THE FIRST SONG that comes to mind is *Moonchild* by **IRON MAIDEN**. It's not the song so much as the role it played. The reason it has a big meaning for me personally is that it was the first song from the first metal tape I ever got. I was about 11, I didn't know what heavy metal was, and after five minutes, I knew what the real deal was! Ha ha ha! That really changed my life. Still when I listen to this song, it's like pure adrenaline to me, because I remember this moment. Another song from that same tape was *Diary Of A Madman* by **OZZY OSBOURNE**. There's this very nice, acoustic guitar intro of the title track, and that was the moment that made me wanna play guitar. It took a couple of years, but I made the dream real!

Stepping back to my childhood, I would pick *Rock You Like A Hurricane* by **SCORPIONS**. I remember I was around six years old when my parents and I went to a holiday in the South of France. We had, like, 12 hours of driving, and my dad was playing *Love At First Sting* in the car. I was so fascinated by this sound, I made my father play this tape for the whole 12 hours. In the end, the tape broke – but I don't know if it was *really* broken, or if my father just wanted to get rid of it!

Seasons In The Abyss by **SLAYER** was, to me, a step deeper into really heavy metal music, in particular the title track. It has this very atmospheric darkness that really left a deep impression on me. It was followed by a lot of death metal – I explored that in the early 90s. But at the same time, I also listened to melodic stuff, and one song that's important in how I think of songwriting to this very day with Powerwolf, is the title track from **SAVATAGE**'s *Gutter Ballet* . It's based on a piano, it's dramatic, but it still contained this madness that makes heavy metal so special.

"I PLAYED THAT SCORPIONS TAPE FOR 12 HOURS… UNTIL IT BROKE"

It's a title track again! *The IVth Crusade* by **BOLT THROWER**. That was one of those moments where I really explored brutality in music. I'm a huge fan of this band. When I was a teenager I constantly changed death metal projects, and I remember that we covered this song at one of the first shows I played.

This might be unexpected for a metal musician, but **JUSTIN SULLIVAN** from New Model Army did a solo album, *Navigating By The Stars*, in the early 00s. There's one song called *Ocean Rising*, which is one of the most emotional songs I've ever listened to. That's the kind of music I listen to on tour. If you've played a metal show, you have heavy music all day, so when I'm lying in the Nightliner at night, I listen to this to try to calm down a bit.

I would also pick *Embers Fire* from **PARADISE LOST**. It was one of those game-changers for me, and actually brought me back from being a death metal kid to the more melodic approach. I still love this band. It's one of the bands I'm still fanboying over today!

A song from recent years that really touched me is *He Is* by **GHOST**. I was totally impressed by the writing. I like the whole approach of Ghost, which is a bit similar to how we see Powerwolf – the whole thing with the music and the visuals, the thing of creating a world of its own.

The Age Of Nero by **SATYRICON** is one of those albums that heavily left an impression on me, and I would pick the song *Black Crow On A Tombstone*. The album is very simple, stripped down to the core of what heavy metal is, and that's something that really impressed me. To me, this is an iconic album.

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LIFE LESSONS

DERRICK GREEN

The Sepultura frontman talks travel, vegan life and getting sober

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURE: MARCOS HERMES

FRONTMAN WITH LEGENDARY

Brazilian brutes Sepultura for the last 24 years, Derrick Green is modern metal's favourite gentle giant. To celebrate the release of his band's new album, *SepulQuarta* (a star-studded live set culled from weekly lockdown sessions), Derrick chatted with *Hammer* about the joys of punk rock, the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, the power of positive thinking and the surprising but delightful outcome of an alcohol-free existence.

LOUD, AGGRESSIVE MUSIC IS THE BEST MUSIC

"Music was introduced into my life at a very young age because my mom was a music teacher. So at home we had a piano, and she'd play classical music all the time. She also played gospel music, because she played at church. But I got really into rock music once I started meeting other kids who introduced me to The Beatles and AC/DC and Judas Priest. I was like, 'Yes! This is so cool!' I started ordering tapes, from Cheap Trick to Pat Benatar and even Ted Nugent at the time! Ha ha! I didn't know! But then I really dove into hardcore and the punk rock scene and there was full-on slamming and stagediving. I'd never seen music drive people to do those kinds of things and I just knew. *This* was what I wanted to do."

BECOMING A VEGAN WAS AN INFORMED CHOICE

"It all started when I was 14 or 15, when I started going to shows. One band in particular was Cro-Mags, this band from New York. They came and played and they had *books*. Some of them were about the Krishna lifestyle, because the singer was very into that, and they were vegetarians and vegans. I just dove right into it. At the same time I started reading a lot of different books about the whole production of meat. As time went on, I started to become knowledgeable about the industry and also, through that time period, started to realise how it was having an effect on the planet and how they're destroying it. So I really decided I didn't want to give any money to these companies anymore, or to support them."

COOKING TASTY VEGAN FOOD ISN'T ROCKET SCIENCE

"There are so many different websites and things people are doing, explaining techniques. It's super-easy to find. There are great apps, like HappyCow. Anywhere I go in the world, I open HappyCow and it shows me all the places to eat that are vegan or vegetarian or that have both options. But always go with flavour and taste. That's what's changed radically in the plant-based world. Growing up, a lot of stuff was flavourless and it put people off because vegan food tasted like shit! Ha ha! But they've got really good at it. Ask your vegan or vegetarian friends what they like. Otherwise, go online and people will help you tremendously."

GENTLE PERSUASION IS THE WAY FORWARD

"It really turns me off when radical vegans are getting in people's faces. I think they gave it a really bad name by being so extreme and showing all these horrifying, crazy videos for shock, and not really explaining what's going on in the process. That explanation is really important, so people truly *understand*. It's about literally living by example. Veganism is not that crazy and we *can* find things that are good for the planet and our bodies, because a lot of those things are really relevant right now. Especially with climate change and things like that, people are really starting to believe it. One day they're like, 'Oh my God, it's so hot here now! It was never like this before!' Well, it's all connected with what we're doing on this planet."

"WHEN YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE NOT PARTYING, IT'S HARD AT FIRST"

BEING HEALTHY IS ADDICTIVE

"When I started aiming for a healthier lifestyle, the results were obvious. I felt good! I could feel the impact of what I was doing, and other people could see that. I didn't have to preach it. People would say, 'You look fantastic! How old are you?' I looked at a lot of people around me and I didn't think it was that cool seeing bands or artists that were all fucked up onstage. They got this sickness, and I really didn't want to go down that route. I felt that people who looked after themselves had longevity, and that was commendable to me. When you're the only one not partying, it's hard at first, but you just get used to it and you feel secure with that."

NOT DRINKING COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE

"When I stopped drinking it was like, 'Oh! So *this* is what it's like to have a normal relationship with your toilet!' Ha ha ha! Looking at old photos from when I used to drink, I was so bloated and I didn't feel healthy. It just becomes depression after a while, especially the day after drinking, and it just wasn't fun anymore. Having just one glass of wine, that wasn't me. So I just stopped altogether. I feel so much better. Suddenly I was spending no money and I could remember many things! Ha ha! So that and taking care of myself, food-wise, it all helped to bring out that healthiness. It just became a lifestyle, in the truest sense. I don't want to eat crappy food because it makes me feel crappy. I like to feel good about myself, so I just do those things that make me feel good."

DON'T LOSE SLEEP OVER THINGS YOU CAN'T CHANGE

"When I joined Sepultura, I knew there would be a backlash, but I looked at the situation in terms of what was reality to *me*. Max [Cavalera] was somebody I'd never met. I didn't know anything about anything he was going through. So that part of Sepultura had nothing to do with me at all. All I could control and focus on was the fact that I was in Brazil, I'd never been there before and I'd never heard people speaking Portuguese! Those were the things that were really on my mind, like how am I going to connect with these guys? How are we going to move forward and write music? This was my moment, you know? I was going to be performing in front of thousands of people. That's where my mind was at!"

PEOPLE APPRECIATE HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION

"I knew it would take time to win some of the fans over, but a lot of good things come out of that process of building things up again. That's how Sepultura developed its fanbase over time, always evolving, having ▶

Derrick Green: fuelled by veg and good vibes

"I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS COOL SEEING BANDS THAT WERE ALL FUCKED UP ONSTAGE"

different ideas and never making the same album twice. Now, when we play the new songs from when I first joined, there's a big difference. Back then, a lot of people were standing, arms folded, like, 'Alright, let's see what happens…' but that was understandable. Now we play those songs and we get a lot of respect. People can see the evolution and they appreciate that we stuck it out."

CLEARING THE AIR IS ALWAYS THE BEST OPTION

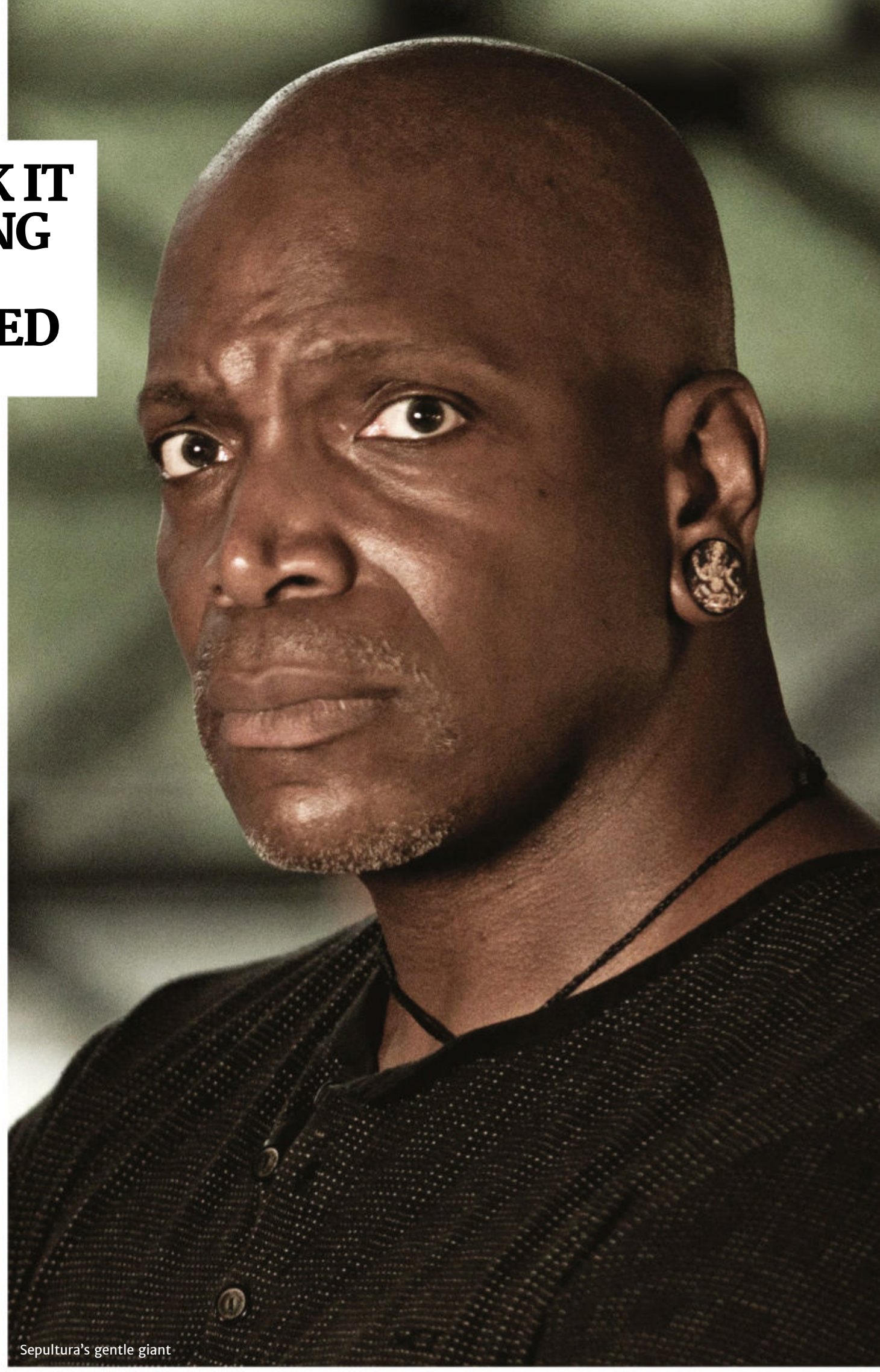
"We've spent so much time on the road together over the years that it becomes like family. So you really need to communicate your feelings. You get to know when certain things aren't right, and it's good not to sleep on those things and to talk them out, before moving forward with anything. Don't go to bed angry, as they say! We definitely do that. If there is a problem, let's talk it out now. It's super-important, to keep that connection going. You all see yourselves going in a certain direction, so everyone needs to be on the same page, wanting us to be better, not just as a group but personally too."

BEING OPEN ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IS ESSENTIAL

"To be honest, I don't recall anyone *ever* talking about mental health, back in the day. There are a lot more people suffering with mental issues that are able to come out and talk about it now. These are definitely different times. I remember when certain people were suffering from it on the road, and there was just nowhere to go. It wasn't talked about and people just didn't have an understanding of the issues involved. But I think music helps a lot. A lot of artists have suffered from mental illness, and by being able to write about it through their music or through their art, I think that's helped millions of people tremendously."

TRAVEL REALLY DOES BROADEN THE MIND…

"I feel we're very fortunate to travel to so many places and to see, first-hand, what's going on. For instance, a lot of people in the US have a horrible perception of Russia, because the negatives were shoved down our throats for so long, and it was the same in Russia, regarding America. But going there numerous times, and seeing it for myself, I *love* the place. So when people ask, 'Oh, you've been to Russia, what's it like?' I tell them the real aspects of it, from actually being there. It's the same with Brazil – I didn't realise how many people have such warped conceptions about it, but being in a Brazilian band and travelling, I get to hear those warped conceptions and I get to explain that they're absolutely false and *this* is my experience of living there."



Sepultura's gentle giant

IF PLANS GO WRONG, JUST MAKE ANOTHER PLAN

"We came out of the writing process for *Quadra* [Sepultura's 2020 studio album] and it was such a magical experience, then we went into practising, getting ready for the tour, and then the lockdown came. The momentum that we had going, that turned into the *SepulQuarta* record. It was a great way to stay connected, to have something once a week where we get together once a week and talk with our fans. It grew out of that. Let's invite people and let's jam Sepultura songs! Let's invite people that aren't even involved in music, people we admire and respect. So a lot of it came out of the necessity of keeping a connection within the band and with the fans. It was a beautiful thing to have an album come out of that."

SEPULTURA'S NEW LIVE ALBUM, *SEPULQUARTA*, IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

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IN THE STUDIO

LEPROUS

Norwegian prog maestros Leprous celebrate 20 years with their most epic and personal album to date

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: TOBIAS AASGAARDEN

NO TWO LEPROUS records sound quite alike, which is precisely how the Norwegian prog masters have cultivated a reputation for boundary-pushing creativity. A series of livestreams over lockdown may have kept them busy, but not even a global pandemic could confine their innovation, as they soon found out when a planned EP expanded until it became their new full-length album, *Aphelion*. *Hammer* caught up with vocalist Einar Solberg to find out why this album is the perfect landmark for Leprous as they hit the two-decade mark.

What did the recording process look like for the new record?
"It's been very different; we had to use three separate studios and move around a lot. It all started with two songs we decided didn't quite fit on [2019 album] *Pitfalls* – *On Hold* and *Silhouette*. We already had those songs basically finished, so went into recording at Cederberg initially thinking we'd just release an EP. Soon we found we had more ideas than we'd first thought! Most of the songs ended up being recorded across all three studios. That naturally meant the album came together more song by song rather than as one concept. But that also meant the process was a lot more intuitive."

Working so gradually, were there any songs that proved to be a challenge?
"I actually wrote [album opener] *Running Low* while climbing a mountain. I started with the idea of the song on my phone as I was climbing and at first it felt pointless. When I got back home, though, I started working on chord progressions and vocal lines and I was able to develop the song quickly – proving that you can't just sit and wait for inspiration to drop into your lap – you have to try different things."

Leprous: going big for their birthday

Like using brass for the first time, in addition to the strings that appeared on *Pitfalls*. What do you think brass adds to the Leprous sound?
"With both brass and strings it feels almost orchestral – we have this idea that you can make something massive without necessarily having a wall of overdubbed guitars. The problem with just using guitars is the sound becomes incredibly similar to other bands, so we wanted to experiment with using these other instruments or even synths and choirs to make songs feel massive."

Was it a conscious decision, then, to move away from the heavier, guitar-driven sound?
"Almost nothing I do in music is a conscious decision – just like in life in general. Life happens and you change so gradually you don't even notice until eventually something you'd have done 10 years ago feels completely unnatural now."

The last record was said to be your most personal. Did you want to continue to explore that on *Aphelion*?
"It was just a natural process, to be honest. I didn't exactly feel done with my personal issues after talking about them on *Pitfalls*; a lot of that was just the early stages of recognition, realising there are these internal emotions that can suddenly take over your life. With *Aphelion* we're moving into places where we can start to accept things and deal with them as part of life that will come and go."

The title itself references the point the Earth is furthest from the sun. Was there a sense of poetic parallel in that and how everything looked during the deepest parts of the pandemic?
"Exactly! The front cover we've got for the record has this pyramid-type building with a person confined inside, while there's this whole beautiful world outside they're confined away from. It's about doing the best you can with what you have, rather than idly wishing you had more to work with. Times like this can make you passive, or it can boost your creativity because it drags you out of your everyday routines."

What do you think *Aphelion* says about Leprous 20 years into your career?
"Honestly if this is the first Leprous record you're hearing in 20 years, it's the album that best shows our musical range, while the lyrics show just how far we've come. Ten years ago, I'd have struggled to write songs like these."

***APHELION* IS OUT ON AUGUST 27 VIA INSIDEOUT**

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
7

PRODUCER:
Self-produced (mixed by Adam Noble, mastered by Robin Schmidt)

STUDIOS:
Cederberg Studios, Norway/ Ghost Ward Studios, Sweden/ Ocean Sound Recordings, Norway

EXPECT:
Expansive melodic prog with a flair for dramatic dynamics

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INSIDEOUT MUSIC

THE STORY BEHIND

BRACKISH

BY KITTIE

Nu metal was a baggy-panted boys' club – until Canadian teens Kittie stormed in with all guns blazing, and a debut single that was all about empowerment

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

The classic Kittie line-up (left to right): Morgan Lander, Talena Atfield, Mercedes Lander, Fallon Bowman

METAL HAS LONG been a male-dominated space, but was arguably never as testosterone-driven as during the late 90s/early 00s nu metal goldrush. When Kittie released their debut album, *Spit*, in January 2000, it cut through the baggy pants bravado like a knife. Not only did it go harder and more aggressive than any nu metal album doing the rounds, with shades of death metal cutting through mountainous Korn-esque grooves, it also had thought-provoking and defiant songs like *Choke* and *Suck*, and sought to subvert gender expectations. And with *Brackish*, the band hit upon nu metal's only genuine anthem of empowerment.

Yet, when the four then-teenagers headed into EMAC Studios in Ontario to record *Spit* in the summer of 1999, they had no expectations. After playing a showcase at Canadian Music Week a few months earlier, Kittie had been signed by NG Records, a small, independent punk label kicking up dust out of NYC, on a four-album deal. But even then, the band cheerfully admit the magnitude of the situation was lost on them. "I remember signing the deal, but it wasn't like the golden magical pen like, 'Hey, you guys got your big record deal'," says vocalist Morgan Lander. "It felt very low key. We were so young, we were just here for the ride. We thought this would be a fun summer project. We were going to press 5,000 copies of *Spit* and that was going to be it."

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2000

PERSONNEL:
Morgan Lander (vocals, guitar)
Fallon Bowman (guitar, vocals)
Tanya Candler (bass, vocals)
Mercedes Lander (drums)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
31

Given the band were still in high school, the *Spit* recording sessions, with Rage Against The Machine producer Garth Richardson, took place over nine days with the band doing their homework between takes. One song that would emerge from the sessions as particularly special was *Brackish*, which, with its jittery opening, brash, skittering electronic undercurrent and huge chorus, sounded worlds apart from anything else in the scene at the time. It would eventually become *Spit*'s first single and launch the band's career, but it almost never saw the light of day.

"I'd call that song an afterthought," says Morgan's sister and the band's drummer, Mercedes. "We weren't even going to record it for *Spit* at all."

"There is no video or audio recordings pre-recording of *Spit* that have *Brackish* in them in its current incarnation," adds Morgan. "The song we played before that was in a different key and the song structure was the same, but it was very basic. There was no melody, there was just a talking part during the verse and then the chorus there was nothing but was a scream before the [main riff]. We recorded it but then we weren't sure if we were going to put it on the album or leave it as an instrumental."

Frustrated that the song was still plateauing, the band asked their sound engineer to bring in a friend who could DJ to take things to the next level. "We paid him a case of beer to play us some cool jungle," laughs Mercedes. "The beats elevated [the song] to a place where the music stood out, but there still wasn't a vocal melody that matched that elevation."

Brackish's now-iconic chorus wouldn't come together until a few weeks later, when Morgan returned to the studio to lay down additional vocals. "I remember sitting on the floor in the vocal booth writing the lyrics down, it was right at the very tail-end, like, 'I have no idea what I'm going to say here. I'll just think of something.' The chorus then the screaming part underneath that, I wrote on the floor. We spent one day, and I banged it out."

Spit was originally released in November 1999 but was quickly pulled from the shelves and reissued when NG was bought out by Artemis Records at the end of the year. Around the same time, original bassist Tanya Candler left the band and was replaced by Talena Atfield, completing what many still believe is the 'classic' Kittie line-up along with lead guitarist Fallon Bowman. Together, the band filmed the video for *Brackish* during New York's CMJ music festival at a gig supporting Biohazard. "[Renowned music video director] Floria Sigismondi wrote this incredible treatment with car crashes," remembers Morgan. "But the label didn't want to pay the

GETTY

price it would have cost, so we ended up doing a live video."

"We were being heavily played on K-Rock [Radio] and had started to build a following," adds Mercedes. "At that point, we actually had Kittie fans turning up to our shows, but the crowd was [mostly] industry people, which is hilarious because there's definitely some push mosh going on."

With *Brackish* on constant rotation on music video channels, things escalated quickly and in January 2000, Kittie were booked to support Slipknot on the Iowans' first headline tour. "We left for the tour, and I just never went back to high school," says Morgan. "Those first 5,000 copies that we thought we were only going to seek for the entirety of our career flew off the shelves in a couple of days when *Spit* was released and then it started to sink in, the true size of what was to come."

That July, just a year after being signed, Kittie played the second stage at Ozzfest. Opening for headliners Soulfly, they were the youngest and only female band on the bill.

But rapid success also had a downside, and from the outset, the band found themselves exposed to the rampant misogyny of the 00s metal scene, and locked in a constant battle to be taken seriously. Reviews of *Spit* at the time of its release unanimously refer in astonishment to the fact the band were women. On a prominent US chat show a suggestion that they were "Britney Spears meets Slayer"

"WE LEFT FOR THE TOUR, AND I JUST NEVER WENT BACK TO HIGH SCHOOL"

MORGAN LANDER

was greeted by stony expressions and palpable annoyance. Meanwhile, during gigs, men would peek behind their amps, so certain they would find a bloke back there actually playing the guitars.

"Being a young person and having that around you really hurts. It sucks," says Morgan. "There were suggestions made [by our label], 'Maybe you can hire a songwriter to help you' and we were like, 'Fuck that.' We were so defiant looking back, maybe it was detrimental with our relationship with the label. We said no to many things – I'm pretty sure Calvin Klein asked us to do [an advert] and we were like, 'Fuck you, no way.' That would have been huge! We were so much in control of our career and direction, we didn't want anyone to question the validity of our songwriting skills or our abilities as musicians. No one could tell us what to do. We wanted to blaze our own trail and that is baked into *Brackish* and also the whole album."

Saying that, in early interviews Kittie's messages were mixed, engaging in gender politics while at the same time denying they were feminists. Rereading the lyrics to *Brackish*, it's easy to forget just how young its creators were when they were written (Morgan was 17 and Mercedes was just 15). Penned about a friend in a toxic relationship with a "gross" older man ('*You know he can't guide you / He's your*

Morgan fronting Kittie at Ozzfest in New Jersey on July 22, 2000

GETTY

"TO THIS DAY, PEOPLE TELL US OUR MUSIC IS EMPOWERING"

MORGAN LANDER

fuckin' shoulder to lean on / Be strong'), the song clearly comes from a place of youthful angst and heightened emotion, yet there's an underlying theme of independence and knowing your self-worth that still resonates 21 years later.

"I don't think we thought far about that narrative and the wider meaning and how empowering the song actually is," considers Mercedes. "I think a lot of our insecurities around feminism back in the early days of our career had a lot more to do with not understanding fully what being a feminist means," adds Morgan. "We were afraid of the negative connotation that can often come with it, from people who also don't understand what it means. We have always represented equality – even our existence challenged equality in the music industry. We fought for equal treatment, equal airtime and equal pay as women. We represented those things then, and still do now, even though we didn't realise that's what it meant to be a feminist."

On their second album, 2001's *Oracle*, Kittie veered away from nu metal, choosing instead to explore their more extreme influences, although they never again did reach the heady heights of their debut. And although the band's 2018 *Origins/Evolutions* 20th anniversary documentary brought Kittie back into the conversation, *Spit* is still something of a lost nu metal gem that deserves more props than it gets. Yet the album's true legacy is its message, which burns just as bright now as it did back then.

"To this day, people come to us and say, 'Your music is so empowering, I've never heard a woman scream like this'," agrees Morgan. "To me, that's the biggest testimony to the music – it's almost timeless. There's something magical about *Spit* in general. It has this raw power that transcends the box nu metal was in. It radiates out. You can feel our youth, our anger, all these emotions that made Kittie who we were back then." MH

KITTIE'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY DOCUMENTARY *KITTIE: ORIGINS/EVOLUTIONS* AND *KITTIE LIVE AT THE LONDON MUSIC HALL* ARE OUT NOW

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WORDS: CONNIE GORDON

"THE GOAL WITH the first album was to come out swinging."

The above quote proudly tumbles from the smiling gob of Brian McClelland, guitarist for Seattle-based rippers Filth Is Eternal, as he describes the intent behind the band's debut album, 2018's *Suffrage*, and how its follow-up, *Love Is A Lie, Filth Is Eternal* compares and contrasts.

"Coming from the previous band that Lisa [Mungo, vocals] and I were doing, He Whose Ox Is Gored, it was a big shift from progressive, experimental metal towards more traditional and immediate hardcore punk where we wanted to make something really gnarly," Brian says. "For the new album, we had time to reflect on what worked during that process and what resonated. We also got a new rhythm section, got to learn all those *Suffrage* songs with the new line-up and apply that knowledge of how these guys play that material to how we wrote the new material, and how we were able to expand our sound beyond coming out swinging and playing fast and hard."

In hindsight, Brian admits that Filth Is Eternal may have come out swinging a bit too hard for the broader and genteel public, especially once they began making headway beyond the world of gigs in sweaty basements and record stores. That's because before landing on Filth Is Eternal as their moniker, the band's original handle was Fucked And Bound, and the description definitely lived up to billing. From the first notes of *Suffrage*'s opener *Wild Thing*, Fucked And Bound shot out of a bristling vein with a barbarous and kinetic metallic hardcore. They also quickly learned that, despite the DIY scene embracing the vulgar nod and innuendo-meets-socio-political-commentary of their original branding, the rest of the world doesn't swing as free and easy or take as kindly to titular confrontation, especially within the murky world of social media.

"Over the course of the pandemic, social media was a wreck everywhere," says Brian, analysing the reasons behind the band's name change. "The fact is we're a largely word-of-mouth kind of band that garners attention from playing live and having really intense live shows where we try to go out and have fun with the crowd. And not being able to play live, while at the same time culture wars were crushing some of the algorithms, we were having a hard time getting to people we were already engaging with. We were even having a hard time getting our record out to fans. Before the pandemic, we were already having problems with booking – we lost a tour because venues were getting opposition to our name. Everything was getting censored more and more. We didn't necessarily want to change the name, but the reality is when you're doing this DIY, you're doing it by the skin of your teeth and we didn't want to put out another record and have all that hard work go to waste.

"But, we also got half a new band. Lisa and I had been doing Fucked And Bound from the beginning with a different drummer and bassist and after we welcomed Rah Davis [bass, ex-Skelator, Cattle Decapitation (live)] and Mat Chandler [drums, Re-buried] we had been talking about a new name because we were a new team."

What has this entire story dripping in 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' irony is the fact that Filth Is Eternal's original moniker was selected

The name has changed, but the heaviness has been ramped up. Excellent stuff

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Unhinged hardcore thrash spitting liberation like a venomous cobra

FOR FANS OF: Trap Them, War On Women, Converge

LISTEN TO: *The Chain*

PRESS

in part as an uncouth reaction to the hammerlock sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have on the world today.

"In some ways, we initially picked Fucked And Bound because it was intense, fun and different, but it was also a 'fuck you' to social media and that kind of thing. We started this band as a side band when Lisa and I were doing He Whose Ox Is Gored, so we've run promotions and venues, done shows, booked our own tours and done that work, so we know what that's like, but I don't know if we expected this band to take off in the way it has and the reality is that it's really hard to get anything done today without social media. The majority of the way people absorb information, news and culture is through social media. I work in social media, so I have an opinion about it and it's great for certain things, but in a lot of ways it's an unnecessary burden when you run into obstacles for reasons that are incorrect."

Accordingly, Filth Is Eternal responded in the best way they know how; by channelling their frustrations into a 12-burst seismic volley of lacerating and screaming hardcore that's equally as caustic as it is catchy.

"We wanted to reflect our personal intensity and make it so that's there no mistake what you're hearing is us, especially since it's our second album and we have a better knowledge of the tools we're working with. The album was started before the pandemic and we took our time to make sure the mixes and mastering were correct and the sequence and artwork was what we wanted. At the same time, we wrote a bunch of new music during the pandemic, so we have what amounts to almost an entire album of stuff that is even heavier!"

"SOCIAL MEDIA WAS A WRECK OVER THE COURSE OF THE PANDEMIC"

***LOVE IS A LIE, FILTH IS ETERNAL* IS OUT ON AUGUST 27 VIA CHURCH ROAD RECORDS**

NEW NOISE

SLEEP WAKER

Experimental metallers mine the horror of night terrors for inspiration

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURE: ERIC OVERWAY

WHEN SLEEP WAKER drummer and songwriter Frankie Mish was six years old, a demon frequently haunted his dreams. "I had issues with insomnia and sleep paralysis," he says. "I started taking Melatonin to get deeper sleep, but it would just make my dreams weird. I had one reoccurring one where, if I woke up and my door was cracked or open, I could see something in the crack of the door. I felt it sitting on my chest and it felt like I was sinking into the bed. I was being pulled down into dirt and it felt like suffocating…"

Frankie's nightmares have inspired Sleep Waker's bleak and brutal metalcore, which delves into the concept of dream reality and real-life trauma. "It was something I thought was really interesting that I hadn't seen anyone [speak] about," says Frankie, who formed the Michigan-based band with childhood friend and vocalist Hunter Courtright in 2014. "We wanted a loose concept, something people could latch onto."

The band's second album, *Alias*, is a huge, melodic leap forward from their earlier, techier work in terms of songwriting, not least on excellent closer, *Distance*, which sees the quintet mesh together Deftonian agony with stifling, Loathe-esque ambience. It's also a sci-fi nerd's dream, packed with hidden samples and lyrical nods to videogames, *The Matrix*, *Blade Runner* and *The Ghost In The Shell*.

"I'm really hoping it can push us into the next echelon of bands," says Frankie when asked what the band hope to achieve with Alias. "I really hope it connects with a lot of people. I hope people listen to it and find the little Easter eggs we put in there. If they want to experience the music for what it is, they can take it at face value, but if they want to go deeper, there's tons of content in there."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Dark, ferocious metalcore that casts a melancholic spell

FOR FANS OF:
Loathe, Northlane, Deftones

LISTEN TO:
Distance

***ALIAS* IS OUT NOW VIA UNFD**

BLACK MOON MOTHER

Take a wild, ethereal headtrip with these psychedelic Nashville doomsters

WORDS: JOE DALY

"IMAGINE THAT HUMANS achieve interstellar travel and there's a space lounge with a house band that's heavy and alien and scary. We're that band!" says Black Moon Mother drummer Jeff Ehlinger with a laugh.

It's an apt image for the Nashville-based quintet, whose full-length debut, *Illusions Under The Sun*, synthesises a dizzying range of styles into a wild, ethereal headtrip. Founder/vocalist Brianne O'Neill says, "For people new to the scene, I'd say we're dark, heavy rock with angelic vocals. But for those familiar with genres, I'd say we're a mix of psychedelic rock, shoegaze, doom and heavy metal." Genre classifications aside, *Illusions Under The Sun* is a rapturous collection of cosmic bangers that open realms of consciousness well beyond the mind's ordinary operating frequencies.

Indeed, they take their name from the occurrence of a second new moon within a single calendar month – a phenomenon rife with pagan connotations. "I'm very drawn to the heavy and darker side of life," says Brianne. "It can be a healthy way to process anger and sadness, just feeling the growl of the guitar in my body and letting the darkness transmute through the music."

Ultimately, what sets Black Moon Mother apart from their shoegazing contemporaries is not their quixotic blend of styles but their ability to compose music that is both deeply heavy and hopelessly catchy. And it's earning them a steadily expanding fanbase. "People will tell us, 'We didn't realise how much we liked heavy music before seeing you guys,'" Brianne says. "Heavy music can be more than something that just blows your eardrums out."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Cult Of Luna dropping acid and playing Fleetwood Mac covers on top of a mountain

FOR FANS OF:
Chelsea Wolfe, Slowdive, Alcest

LISTEN TO:
High Winds

***ILLUSIONS UNDER THE SUN* IS OUT NOW VIA PETRICHOR**

PRESS

URNE

Ex-Hang The Bastard members' massive riffs get the seal of approval from Trivium and Gojira

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • GAV THANE

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Thrash, doom and prog flourishes subsumed back into a riff-packed classic heavy metal framework

FOR FANS OF:
Mastodon, Baroness, Spirit Adrift

LISTEN TO:
The Palace Of Devils & Wolves

WITH ACCOLADES FROM the likes of Trivium's Matt Heafy and Gojira bassist Jean-Michel Labadie, London trio Urne are one of metal's hottest new bands. "Seeing orders come in from obscure places or people say nice things… it's mental," bassist/vocalist Joe Nally beams. "I thought it was a mistake when Gojira's bassist was talking about us – 'What a donut, he must have the wrong band!' – but then he posted it *again*!"

Having previously played in the likes of Hang The Bastard, Ageless Oblivion and Chapters, Urne's members had a varied pedigree to draw from. For their new band, however, they wanted to sidestep their past and forge something new. "Our first EP was about getting that Hang The Bastard stuff out of Angus [Neyra, guitars] and I's system," Joe explains. "After four years it had become all we knew. Following that, we knew we wanted to do something we never could have [in the other bands]."

Built on a bedrock of fat riffs, Urne's debut, *Serpent & Spirit*, is an expertly crafted paean to classic metal, evoking the fire of early Metallica, expert songcraft of Baroness and seismic grooves of Power Trip. "The most joy I've ever had from music was when I was discovering it," Joe admits. "When I was a teenager I'd use my lunch money to buy CDs because there was 30/40 years' worth of music to explore that I'd never heard. With Urne, I wanted to go back and recapture that buzz."

***SERPENT & SPIRIT* IS OUT NOW VIA CANDLELIGHT**

ANGSTSKRÍG

Mysterious Danish duo meld searing black metal with rock'n'roll

WORDS: ALEX DELLER

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Nordic black metal with a dash of rock'n'roll abandon

FOR FANS OF:
Mantar, Zud, Kvelertak

LISTEN TO:
Lad Paladserne Brænde

***SKYGGESPIL*, THE DEBUT** album from Danish duo Angstskríg, offers a searing mix of black metal bombast and rock'n'roll stomp, but while the music is in your face, its creators remain shadowy, anonymous figures.

"It's always been on the cards that this would happen," says our mysterious contact, of the band's formation. "We were physically apart for several years, but our paths changed and all of a sudden we were near each other again. It was like a creative explosion."

With audacious music and an all-star parade of guitarists chipping in with solos (current and former members of Satyricon, Dragonforce, Hypocrisy and Soilwork are among contributors) you have to wonder how Angstskríg's ambition chimes with the Nordic concept of Janteloven – the notion that you shouldn't stand out from the crowd. "We've talked about Janteloven a lot," says the spokesperson. "It teaches us how to be humble while doing what we love. We wanted to make music with potential, we want to go international with this. Janteloven is like a corrective or mitigating principal – it's all fine and dandy to want this thing, but please stay humble while you're doing it."

***SKYGGESPIL* IS OUT NOW VIA DESPOTZ**

PRESS

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

GHOSTS OF ATLANTIS

"HAILING FROM THE county that spawned the irksome likes of Ed Sheeran and Cradle Of Filth, Ghosts Of Atlantis build their lore around ancient Greece and Atlantis in an epic crossover of styles encompassing Dimmu Borgir, Amorphis and Parkway Drive, weaving historical findings and fantasy into one incredible musical journey."

DANI FILTH
CRADLE OF FILTH

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

METALLICA

THE BLACK ALBUM REMASTERED: DELUXE BOX SET

BLACKENED RECORDINGS

£229.99

THE BIGGEST METAL album of all time deserves a 30th-anniversary box set of audacious opulence. Limited to 500 copies, this suitably lavish set boasts the original album remastered on 180g double vinyl and CD, three live LPs, 14 CDs and six DVDs full of unreleased content, ranging from rough mixes and demos to live audio. And that's before you find the *Sad But True* picture disc, guitar picks, laminates, a folder full of lyric sheets and a 120-page hardback book recounting the band's early-90s glory days. Most importantly, the album itself now sounds even more imperious and crushing than ever. Still essential and now, none more deluxe.

https://tinyurl.com/black-boxset

SPIRITBOX BUNDLE

£60

If you're wholly rolling – thanks, here all week – in cash, you could do worse than this Spiritbox t-shirt, hoodie and CD set. Valiantly sticking to the, er, blue-y theme of their obscenely anticipated debut, *Eternal Blue*.

https://tinyurl.com/spiritbox-bundle

DOOM KEY CARD

£19.99

We sense something fraggin' evil on the horizon, so dust off your chainsaw, look out for hidden doors, slip this replica key card in your camo pants and prepare to wallow knee-deep in the dead!

https://tinyurl.com/doom-keycard

CARCASS T-SHIRT

£17.10

As though acknowledging their early album art could put you off meat for life, this new tee sees Carcass celebrate the simple, earthy joys of the humble vegetable. Descanting the leguminous, anyone?

https://tinyurl.com/carcass-tee

JINJER T-SHIRT

£17.10

Do a reaction video of a vocal coach doing a reaction video to Jinjer's ace new record, *Wallflowers*, while wearing this t-shirt. Then have someone else do a reaction video of your reaction video.

https://tinyurl.com/jinjer-shirt

COSMIC CERTAINTY VEST

£22.99

'Cosmic Certainty' sounds like some ultra-kvlt psychedelic black metal band, so it was a pleasant surprise that it turned out to be this cool devoré cami vest from Killstar. Perfect for the stage, the pit or a trip to Tesco!

https://tinyurl.com/cosmic-vest

SIGNED MATT PIKE LYRIC BOOK

£14.50

Sleep. High On Fire. Mutton chops. Matt Pike's a legend, and now you can pore through his lyrical musings in this gorgeous, signed hardcover tome, with exclusively commissioned illustrations to boot.

https://tinyurl.com/pike-tome

CAGE FIGHT T-SHIRT

£20

Tesseract's James Monteith has started playing, well, whad'ya think a band called Cage Fight, selling a t-shirt that's basically *Vulgar Display Of Power* goes to Eton, sounds like? Thrashy hardcore with standout vocals.

https://tinyurl.com/eton-mosh

ZOMBIE MUG

£21.75

Handcrafted, custom-glazed and preferably filled with brains – or tea, depending on how much you feel like committing to the bit. Either way, this mug's something to consider if you want tradesmen out of your house fast.

https://tinyurl.com/zombie-mugs

IRON MAIDEN WEST HAM JERSEY

£55.99

Perhaps too embarrassed to emblazon this authentic football jersey with the lyrics to *Weekend Warrior*, Maiden opted for a classier, subtle *Die With Your Boots On* detail for the sleeves. Good call, lads – shirt looks wicked.

https://tinyurl.com/iron-hammers

BLACK METAL RAINBOWS BOOK

£7.25-£54.35

Burn the rulebook along with the church! This huge, colourful collection of essays, interviews and art seeks to snatch black metal back from the bigots and put it squarely in the hands of those they seek to silence.

https://tinyurl.com/bm-rainbows

HORROR GNOMES

£13.05

Look, everyone on the street thinks you're weird already. Why not revel in your oddball status by dotting a selection of these horror-themed ornaments across your lawn? Gnome is where the heart is, after all.

https://tinyurl.com/horror-gnomes

HARLEY QUINN JACKET

£99.99

Forget Joaquin Phoenix and his rumpled, ill-fitting suit – the real style icon of DC supervillainy is the glorious Harley Quinn. Now, be a puddin' and order us this replica of her sweet *Suicide Squad* jacket, won't you?

https://tinyurl.com/harley-jacket

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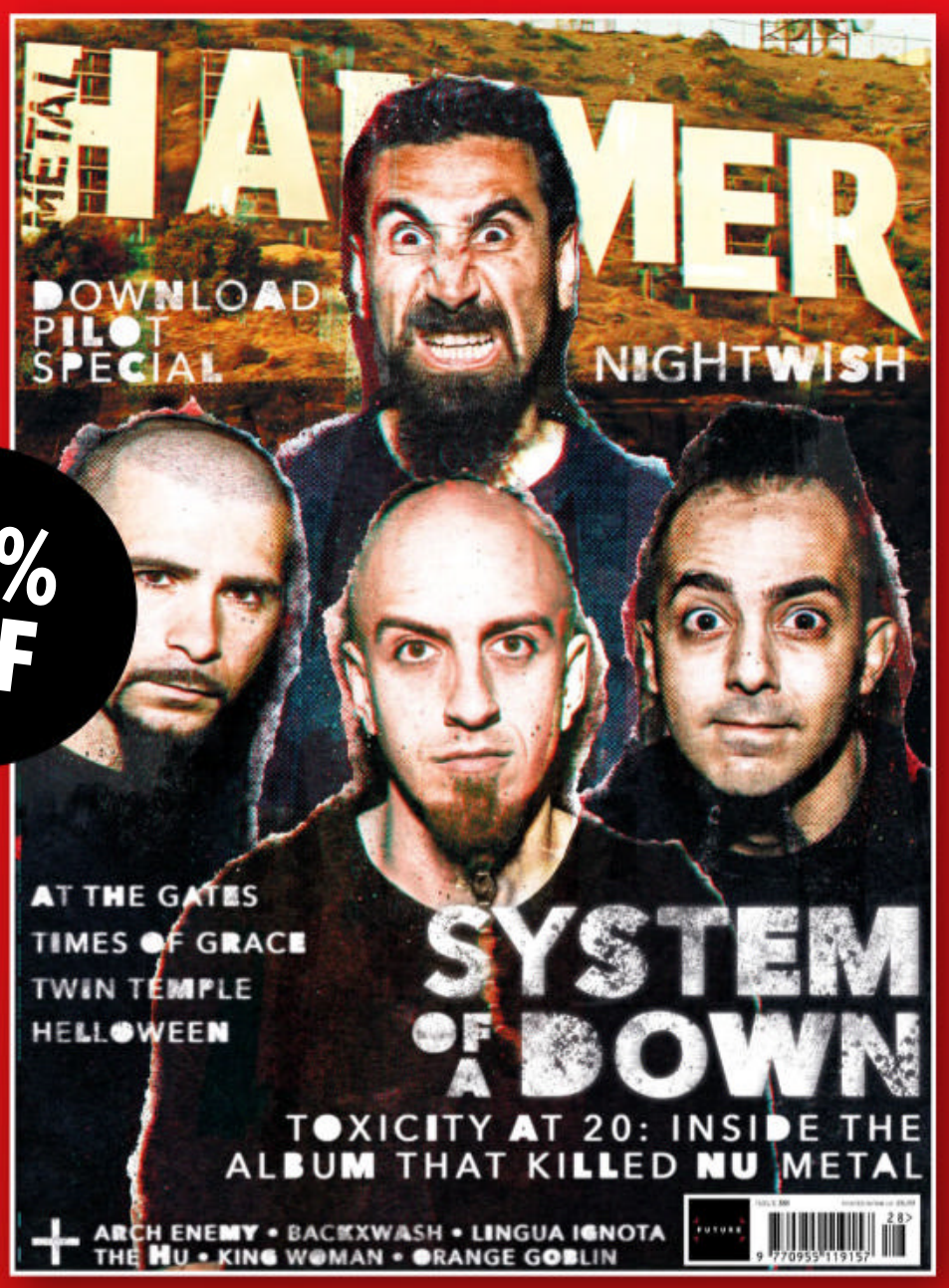

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IRON MAIDEN

82 MINUTES. TEN SONGS THE SAMURAI.

Senjutsu is a certified heavy metal monster. And, as Bruce Dickinson and Janick Gers tell us in an exclusive new interview, it's driven Iron Maiden doolally having to wait two whole years to show it off

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURES: JOHN McMURTRIE

Bruce cannot wait for you all to hear the new album!

“NICKO CAME IN AND SAID, ‘WHAT THE FUCK ARE WE MAKING A RECORD FOR?!’”

BRUCE DICKINSON

The last 18 months have been a nightmare of frustration and cancelled plans for most musicians, but imagine being Bruce Dickinson. When *Hammer* meets the Iron Maiden singer in London, as the band prepare to unveil their 17th studio album, he has a restless, fiery look in his eyes. Dressed, as has become traditional, in the leisurewear of a dedicated cyclist – dark, plain vest; joggers – he greets us with some expected cheery enthusiasm. But as we unzip the monstrous wonders of the album in question, the mighty *Senjutsu*, it becomes increasingly obvious that Bruce has been going slightly mad waiting for the world to open up again. The last time we spoke to him on the eve of the release of a new Maiden album (2015’s *The Book Of Souls*), he cut a relaxed and relieved figure, the spectre of his battle with throat cancer then receding into the distance. But today, Bruce is visibly excited about what comes next, not least because it turns out that Iron Maiden have been sitting on *Senjutsu* since… hang on a pissing minute… *2019*?! No wonder that he is so clearly delighted that we’ve just been granted a sneak preview of the full album. He leans forward in his chair and grins.

“*Good*, isn’t it?” he says. Yes, mate. It’s fucking great.

Surprisingly, but due to some very obvious logistical reasons, the legendary Brits’ 17th studio record has been gathering dust in a can, quite conceivably in some obscure, subterranean vault and guarded by Eddie’s snarling minions, for the best part of two years. Recorded once again at Guillaume Tell Studio in Paris, with long-time collaborator Kevin Shirley manning the controls, *Senjutsu* came together during a brief pause in live activity following the first part of Maiden’s wildly acclaimed Legacy Of The Beast world tour.

“The plan was to have the album out at the end of Legacy Part 2, which was then postponed, and then postponed again,” Bruce grimaces. “So we’d already made the fucking record and *then* we went on tour, knowing that we’d made it! Nicko came into the studio, before we started making it, all grumpy, saying, ‘What the fuck are we making a record for? Fuck me, I was on holiday!’ Ha ha ha! So we just said that we might as well do it, and thank Christ we did, because the whole world went to shit shortly after the end of the tour.”

Iron Maiden played their last pre-pandemic live show in Santiago, Chile, on October 15, 2019. As deeply unpleasant

Janick Gers: *Senjutsu* is his 10th Maiden studio album

events unfolded around the world, it swiftly became apparent that there would be no further opportunities to complete the Legacy Of The Beast tour for some time. Perhaps even longer than certain people expected.

"I was in lockdown, initially in Paris," says Bruce. "I'm sat on the balcony in Paris, it was a lovely sunny day in March, it was a heatwave and super-hot. I remember talking to Rod [Smallwood, longtime Iron Maiden manager] and I said, 'We should do some facemasks!' and he said, 'Nooooo, we're never gonna do facemasks! This'll all blow over!' Ha ha ha!"

Meanwhile, as global chaos erupted, Iron Maiden had a brand new studio album that they really had to keep secret. And so, they did – secret even from themselves.

"I DIDN'T HEAR THIS ALBUM FOR TWO YEARS"

BRUCE DICKINSON

"At the end of the recording, everybody else had fucked off home, so it was basically me, Steve [Harris] and Kevin in the studio," Bruce recalls. "We played it back a couple of times, said, 'Yeah, that's alright then!' and then that was the last time I heard it for nearly two years. All of us! Nobody in the band had a copy! Steve, in particular, was so paranoid that someone would leak it onto the internet, and probably with some justification, it was locked up in a vault. The next time I heard the album was when we were mixing the Mexico live stuff [2020's live album, *Nights Of The Dead*]. I went round to Steve's, and I said, 'You haven't got a copy of the album, have you?' and he said, 'I think it's on my laptop!' And *he* had only played it a couple of times. He hadn't heard it for ages either, so we said, 'Fuck it, put it on the big speakers!' That was when I was thinking, 'Shit a brick, this is *good*.'"

Bruce is perfectly correct, too. Maiden fans have become accustomed to studio albums of high quality, particularly over the band's triumphant last 20 years, and yet *Senjutsu* sounds and feels somehow bigger, better and more emotionally potent than anything the band have recorded since Bruce and guitarist Adrian Smith returned to the fold in 1999, re-joining bassist Steve Harris, drummer Nicko McBrain and guitarists Dave Murray and Janick Gers as an absurdly successful new decade dawned. Significantly, it is also an album that brims with surprises, albeit all very much filtered through that instantly recognisable Maiden bombast. From the monstrous, rumbling storm of the opening title track and the hazy, proggy grooves of *The Time Machine*, to the bluesy stomp'n'squall of first single *The Writing On The Wall* and *The Parchment*'s prog-fuelled labyrinth of riffs and spiralling melodies, *Senjutsu* delivers more of the glorious, classic Maiden same *and* numerous curveballs at the same time.

"The nice thing is to still be able to think outside the box a little bit," Bruce notes. "*The Writing On The Wall* is a great choice for the first single, and another cool thing is that it is in no way indicative of the rest of the album. It should be called 'The Writing *Off* The Wall'! Ha ha ha!"

But somehow it still sounds like Maiden and couldn't be anybody else. Does it give you a collective thrill, that you can still do something different like that?

"Yeah, exactly. It still sounds like us. When Adrian and I sort of put the song together, Adrian had the riff, because Adrian *always* has the riff. Then off we went. I put the melody over it and the words, and it's just one of those songs that wrote itself, almost. We were like, 'Is this going to fly?' but 'Arry [Steve] loved it. He said, 'Yeah, I quite like that sort of Cajun feel!' We both looked at each other, like, '*Cajun*?! Alright, fair enough!' Ha ha ha! But it's got a great feel to it. You might think you've wandered into a fucking Thunder record or something."

Until the drums kick in…

"Oh yeah, the drumming on the whole album is *ridiculous*. It's so good. Honestly? I think it's the best Nicko's ever drummed. Honest to god, going all the way back to *Piece Of Mind* and *Powerslave*, I don't think he's ever drummed better. He's just so on it."

Although not quite as desperate to be let off the leash as his notoriously chill-deficient frontman, six-stringer Janick Gers is in a comparably buoyant mood when *Hammer* speaks with him for another *Senjutsu* debrief a week later. Endearingly, in the midst of the last two years' abject mayhem, the veteran guitarist has missed out on a couple of major

Out 17.09!

MONSTEREO

IN THE HOLLOW OF A WAVE

Monstereo serves catchy melodies and energetic rock songs rooted in 70s rock and psychedelia. "In the Hollow of a Wave" represent the best of two worlds. Catchy melodies, heavy riffs and a big sound, combined with exploratory instrumental sections that build towards a euphoric climax.

Out 10.09!

IF NOTHING IS

IF NOTHING IS

Melding sharp technical skills, creative and splendid songwriting, a keen eye for detail and a streak of madness, the debut album from If Nothing Is is a whirlwind of everything within extreme and technical metal music. For fans of Dødheimsgard, Code, Atheist.

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Iron Maiden (left to right): Janick Gers, Steve Harris, Bruce Dickinson, Adrian Smith, Dave Murray, Nicko McBrain

"I GOT DEATH THREATS"

Kevin Shirley has produced every Maiden record since 2000's *Brave New World*. He spills the secrets of *Senjutsu*

WHICH TRACKS ON *SENJUTSU* CAME FIRST?
"I don't really remember which order they were done in. I do have a log somewhere, so if I had to give a day-by-day in court, I could. I know that Adrian had the original idea for the title track, *Senjutsu*, which he wrote with Steve, and we used elements of his demo on that. *The Writing On The Wall* came later."

SIX YEARS HAVE PASSED BETWEEN ALBUMS. HOW QUICKLY DID YOU SLIP INTO A ROUTINE, OR WAS IT LIKE STARTING FROM SCRATCH AGAIN?
"We just pick up like the previous session was last week. Janick goes to the Irish pub, Adrian goes fishing, Nicko and Davey play golf, Bruce does something extreme – this time he was fencing with the French national team and then broke his Achilles tendon – and Steve and I just work away in the studio, with Denis [Caribaux] engineering. It's a lot of Groundhog Day, but in a good way."

DO YOU HAVE ANY NERVES ABOUT *SENJUTSU* COMING OUT?
"Well, I've learned that you have to be pretty thick-skinned when dealing with some Maiden fans. In the early days of me producing them, I got emails filled with vitriol and even death threats because I wasn't [late producer] Martin Birch, so you have to let it run off you, like water off a duck's back. But I love the album and I hope the fans like it, too – I can't wait to see these tracks live one day."

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SONG ON THE ALBUM?
"*Death Of The Celts* might be my favourite. It's got everything modern, 21st-century Maiden is about. A very moody intro, with a very typically Steve Harris acoustic bassline plucking a melody, almost like an old Jethro Tull melody. Bruce tells a historical saga in song with complex melodies and then it hits with heavy, Celtic, lilting guitars. It's a real story, without repeating lyrics... not the stuff singles are made of! And then a nice Adrian solo, another complex music bit, then a gallop, then a singalong Celtic guitar section. I mean, it is Maiden in one song!"

milestones. Late in 2019, he somehow completely failed to celebrate being a member of Iron Maiden (and continually whacking Eddie in the bollocks with his guitar) for 30 years. Meanwhile, he sounds genuinely startled to find that *Senjutsu* is his 10th Maiden studio record. Nonetheless, Janick is very, *very* enthusiastic about the new record and makes a point of saying how much he enjoyed the process of making it, "even if it seems a long time ago now!"

"Normally we would come in and rehearse for a few weeks, so we pretty much have all the songs," he continues. "Every now and then we've gone in with an extra song or an extra set of ideas, and we've worked them up in the studio, but this time we learned them and played them, as fresh as we could. We have a band with so many ideas, everyone's bringing things in and everyone's trying to make every song better. There's a real camaraderie about how we write as a band. Everyone wants it to be the best. It's just exciting. Isn't that how it should be? Rather than coming in and knowing exactly what's coming next? You never know what's coming next from Maiden and that's part of the strength of the band."

Maiden's collective enthusiasm for trying new ideas and gently tinkering with the band's esteemed formula seems to have gained momentum in recent times. *Senjutsu* may not feature anything *quite* as ambitious or extravagant as *The Book Of Souls*' 18-minute epic, *Empire Of The Clouds*, but its adventurous spirit is brashly on display throughout.

"Yeah, we're always looking for different avenues," notes Janick. "We're treading the Maiden path and whatever we do sounds like us. It doesn't matter what you bring in. It's always worth bringing something in, even if you're thinking, 'Nah, it's not right for Maiden...'! By the time you've finished playing it with Nicko, with the way he plays and how Steve plays his bass, and the way Dave and Adrian play, it's all just very natural. We don't sit and work a lot of stuff out, we just play and it seems to gel. No one has to be told what to do, and it all comes out sounding like Maiden."

Janick has two writing credits on the new album: the short, sharp and catchy *Stratego* and the woozy, menacing *The Time Machine*, both co-written with Steve Harris. But it's the sheer open-ended, creative free-for-all that Maiden continue to enjoy in the studio that seems to delight him the most.

"I just think we still surprise each other. I've never been in a band with so many ideas. There are so many ideas flowing in all the time, and so many that never get used! When you look at the amount of stuff that's on this album... in the past, an album would be 40 minutes long. These are like triple albums!"

And do you agree with Bruce that Nicko is on particularly brilliant form on this album?

"Ah, yes, Nicko is playing great. He's a powerhouse," Janick replies. "He

KEVIN SHIRLEY: GETTY

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Maiden live shows are on their way! Thank whichever deity you can think of

"WE WOULD RATHER PUT OUR EMOTIONS INTO SHOWS THAN GO ON A CHAT SHOW AND TALK ABOUT IT"

BRUCE DICKINSON

powers the band. He *pushes* the band. He's got an incredible personality – there's about five of him I think! Ha ha ha! But he's incredible. You need that powerhouse behind you. He's 70 next year? He's playing like a teen. It's incredible. I've never heard him so solid. I don't think you can tour, the way we've toured over the years, and not be fit. If your mind's clear and you're fit and healthy, then you're playing better and being creative. So we're all fit… for old men…"

At just under 82 minutes long and rammed to the gills with epic, exhilarating moments, *Senjutsu* is an album that will doubtless tick every conceivable box for discerning fans of Iron Maiden. But there are numerous moments when the band sound more fiercely imaginative than ever before. Again, the opening title track stands out as particularly astonishing: palpably heavier than anything Maiden have recorded in the past, and yet graced with a soaring vocal performance from Bruce that will *definitely* cause grown metalheads to become a bit misty-eyed. It's no kind of typical Maiden song, and yet could not be the work of anyone else, right down to Steve Harris's hazily cryptic tales of – we *think* – threatened imperial walls and swarming, warring tribes in ancient Japan.

"Steve picked that as the title track. I don't know why, but he suddenly got bitten by the Japanese bug," Bruce states. "I've been trying to find out the origin of the word 'Senjutsu' and there seem to be multiple variants, but as far as Steve's concerned, it means 'The Art Of War'. But to be honest, I don't really care. It's a good excuse for chopping things up with samurai swords! The album is not a concept album. The cover has a concept and it's Eddie as a samurai, so that's great. I love his transformation into a samurai in the video. But the rest of the album? It's not a concept album about that at all. It's a collection of different songs."

And what songs they are. Noticeably dominated by notions of war and death, *Senjutsu* seems to exhibit some form of faint kinship with 2006's *A Matter Of Life And Death*:

THE NUMBER OF THE EAST

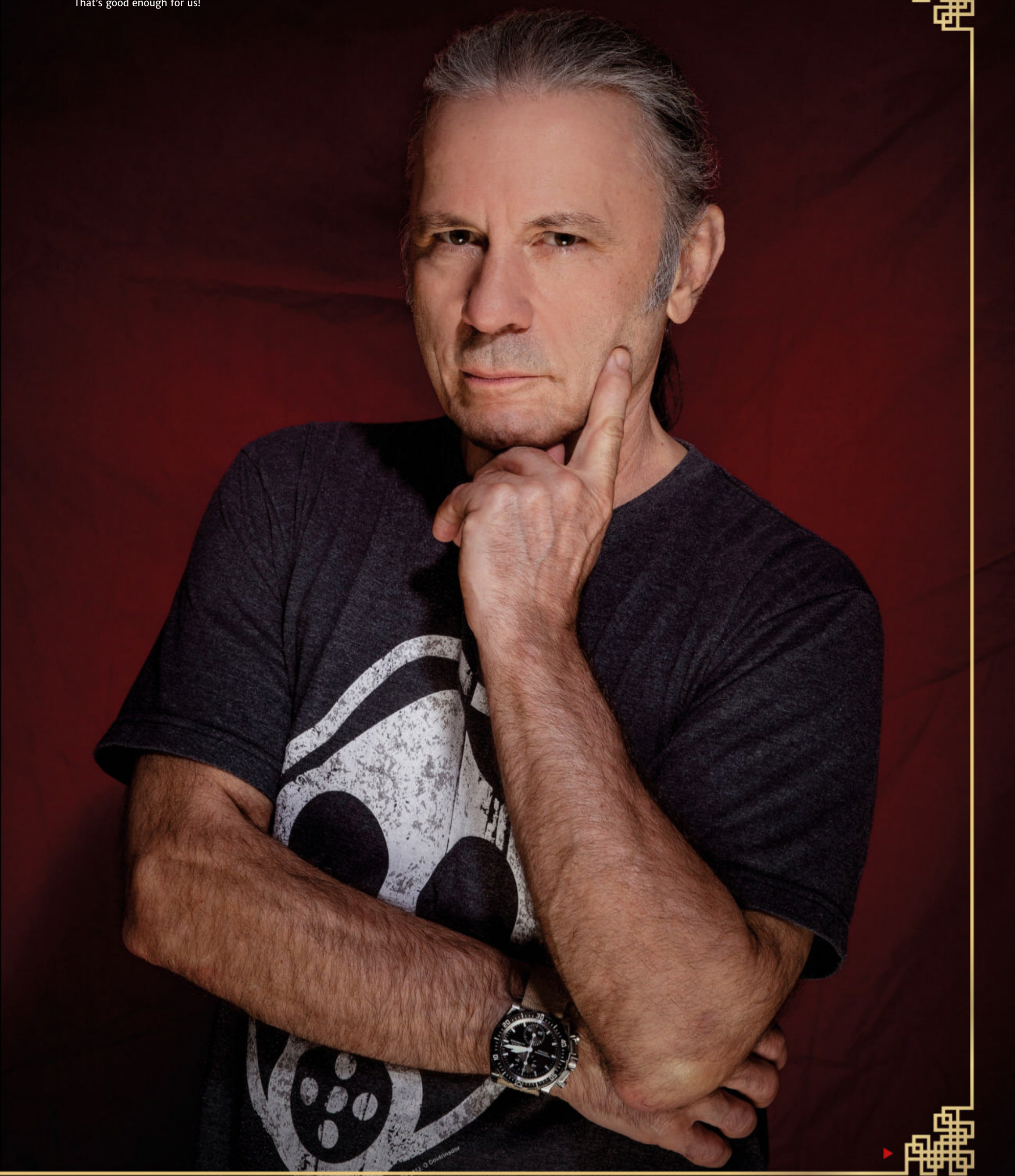
We asked Takahide Okami, Editor at *Metal Hammer* Japan, for his take on Iron Maiden's new musical and visual direction

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT *SENJUTSU*'S FIRST SINGLE, *THE WRITING ON THE WALL*?
"This song has beautiful melody lines reminiscent of *Rime Of The Ancient Mariner* and *The Wicker Man*, regardless of their different tempos. From the intro arpeggio, the level of expectation rises as if something is likely to happen. In some senses, this is a straightforward song that won't explode in the venue, but it acts as a teaser for how the album will develop. Or it could work at the very end of their show, maybe…"

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF SAMURAI EDDIE?
"Very early on [in 1981], Eddie had a katana [a long, curved, single-edged sword traditionally used by samurai] on the *Maiden Japan* EP artwork. He was shown wrestling a Sumo on the merchandise for 2016's performance at Ryōgoku Kokugikan – a sumo wrestling hall – and now he's become a wild samurai! From the album artwork, it seems as if he is from the Heian (794-1185 AD) to the Kamakura (1185-1333 AD) era. If so, he is a samurai from the wildest times – that is very Eddie."

AND HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT A JAPAN-THEMED IRON MAIDEN ERA?
"For us being Japanese, it is a delightful thing, but including the record title, *Senjutsu*, there is a slight question of, 'Why Japan now?' Ha ha! In the past, there were quite a few times that Iron Maiden's Japanese shows were cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances [in 2020 at the height of the pandemic, and 2011 due to the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami]. We hope that soon, Eddie will be wielding a sharp katana to fight against Janick Gers onstage!"

Bruce says *Senjutsu* is “a step up”.
That’s good enough for us!



Steve Harris: “bitten by the Japanese bug” and all about ‘The Art Of War’

for many, the pick of Maiden’s post-millennial studio albums, and another record with a prevailing atmosphere of war-torn dread. Bruce is eager to point out that *Senjutsu* was all written and recorded before the pandemic, and so if the new songs seem to reflect ongoing dark times, it is more due to (un)happy coincidence than anything more deliberate. Instead, Maiden continue to demonstrate how it is still possible to conjure universal themes that resonate widely, even in an increasingly divided age. Notably, the melancholic and brooding *Darkest Hour* delves into the achievements and personal turmoil of no lesser figure than Winston Churchill, with results that are poignant, unsettling and proudly representative of the human experience in all its infinitely complex and daunting splendour.

“Yeah, Churchill is a case in point,” says Bruce. “You’ve got somebody who was a very flawed character.

“IT’S NOT ABOUT PLAYING THE SAME SONGS OVER AND OVER”

JANICK GERS

He suffered from depression, he was probably a functioning alcoholic. But at the one time when it actually mattered, he stood up, when other people would’ve rolled over. You’ve got to be prepared to fight sometimes, for what you believe in and for your freedom. Here was a man who was riddled with self-doubt, no matter what the external perception was.”

A lot of Maiden music seems to be about survival, resilience and heroism, and this album more than most…

“A *lot* of it is about self-sacrifice. It might be in a wartime environment or situation, but war brings out the worst *and* best in everything. From nuclear power stations to satellites, our entire modern world is largely based on what NASA and the Soviet Union developed in the space programme. The reason they developed it was not that they were just dreamers; it was because it was a pissing contest between two psychopathic empires! And you can’t take the complexity out of human relations like that, unfortunately. We are what we are.”

Despite Maiden’s reputation for writing songs about historical events and real-world battles, the band have also mined a rich seam of introspection and existential meandering over the last four decades. Outwardly, of course, Maiden are eternally invincible: undisputed gods of heavy metal, revered around the world, and visibly having a rather lovely time doing it. But songs from the new album like *Darkest Hour* and grandiloquent finale *Hell On Earth* (the latter written by Steve

THE ART OF WAR

Illustrator Mark Wilkinson created not just one, but two new Eddies! Here's how he came up with *Senjutsu*'s killer artwork

WHAT WAS YOUR BRIEF FOR *SENJUTSU*?
"Iron Maiden's management sent me the title first, and then a 'mood board' from Steve. He emailed a few pages of reference pictures collaged together. There were samurai warriors and creatures from Japanese oni mythology – demons or ogres with one or more horns growing out of their heads, plus an extra set of fangs. There were kabuki masks and tattoos, Japanese water dragons... all sorts. It was up to me to interpret it."

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT DESIGNING A NEW VERSION OF SOMETHING AS ICONIC AS EDDIE?
"I knew I would have difficulty just plonking Eddie into a samurai costume. The higher caste warriors usually had many layers of highly ornate, dense fabric both to protect and pad them out on the battlefield – I couldn't see such a costume working for the skeletal figure of Eddie. Besides, he would look far too flamboyant. I also resisted putting the traditional samurai helmet on his head. It would cover too much detail of the early kabuki-style 'mask' of red warpaint I had sketched out for him. The helmet 'cowl' and 'fukigaeshi' earpieces were like skin and bone attachments. Eddie's head was like a cyborg – part creature, part machine – especially with all the bashed-in metal and torn rustic leather of the rest of his costume."

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE?
"It worked front-on, because the details merged into the shadows, but as soon as I tried to visualise Eddie from the side, it was less effective. I knew Iron Maiden would want a vast catalogue of images, so I had a problem! I asked a friend of mine, Michael Knowland, a brilliant 3D artist who worked on the game *The Last Of Us*, to help me visualise the head and 'bolted-on' samurai parts. Mike sculpted the head and shoulders so I could work out the angles and shadows needed for further illustrations. It sort of worked – we kept the fierceness of the kabuki mask, but it still didn't look that convincing for any other angle, apart from the front. I suggested to Steve that I ought to try the helmet. I created the design and asked Mike to sculpt it to see how it might fit the model we already had."

WHAT DID STEVE THINK OF IT?
"He liked both illustrations and called me one day to suggest that we have a double front cover – we'd use both! Eddie is all things to all the fans anyway, a mythical creature, so why not present him as the oni demon – an invisible spirit – but also as the sentient being of a samurai when in battle. It made perfect sense!"

Harris) continue to add to a palpable sense that both lyricists have experienced a few dark nights of the soul along the way.

"Yeah, the difference is, I suppose, that Steve and I would both rather put that into shows and albums than go onto chat shows and talk about it," Bruce counters. "I know Steve has quite a deep-seated distrust of what we think of as being the modern world. To the extent that in *Hell On Earth*, the song is saying 'Are we done here yet? Can we just start again and I'll see you in another life, on the other side, when we've all gone back to normal?'"

So what exactly is normal at this point? A stunning new Iron Maiden album is definitely a good start. Some face-shredding live shows would also be nice, and those are coming too. Maiden return to the Legacy Of The Beast tour next summer, with a Download appearance on June 11 firmly on the schedule and, according to Janick, the vague promise of at least a couple of songs from *Senjutsu* being added to that already well-established setlist. Meanwhile, Bruce has fully recovered from a recent hip replacement operation and is, in his own words, "jumping around all over the place" in anticipation of a return to the stage. Maiden are back and it's all kicking off. That sounds pretty close to normal to us.

"*Senjutsu* hasn't been so long in the making, just long in the waiting!" Bruce declares, sounding genuinely exasperated at it all. "This album is a step up. *A Matter Of Life And Death* was really good. I've gone back and revisited it a little bit, and I thought, 'Shit, that was really good album.' With this one, I'd go back to an album like *Brave New World*, which I think was a *fantastic* record. So I'm *really* chuffed with this one."

"It's not about going out and playing the same songs over and over again. If you're still creating stuff, then that's what makes you valid," Janick concludes. "There's always something new coming from Maiden. We're excited about doing it all again and getting back on the road. Sure, we're not getting any younger, and who knows about the future? But right now, we're creatively *buzzing*. I think we're still at the top of our game."

***SENJUTSU* IS OUT SEPTEMBER 3 VIA PARLOPHONE. IRON MAIDEN WILL HEADLINE DOWNLOAD 2022 NEXT JUNE**

MAIDEN JAPAN

Eddie is a samurai now! We know it looks cool, but what does it actually *mean*? We asked Michael Wert, university professor and author of *Samurai – A Concise History*, to educate us

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

You're literally the man who wrote the book on samurai…
"Well, half of the book is dedicated to what I would term 'pre-modern' samurai, which is to say from their origins in the 8th or 9th century CE up to the Warring States period [civil war lasting from the late 15th to the late 16th century]. The second half covers the Tokugawa period, also known as the Edo period, from the 1600s to the collapse of the warrior regime in 1868 and the disbanding of the samurai caste."

Can you tell us about the origins of the samurai?
"Early Japanese periods worked on conscript armies modelled on Tang China [618-907, when the Tang dynasty ruled], where you'd have *Braveheart*-type people who were essentially farmers with a sword stashed away for times of war. The samurai caste was instead envisioned as this elite class of nobility that specialised in warfare, so in the 17th century they basically made families choose between farming and fighting – you couldn't do both."

We came across something called the Tennji battle. What significance did it have?
"Tennji was the final battle that established that the Tokugawa shogunate had no more rivals. There were three unifiers or conquerors who were significant to Japan – Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyosi and Tokugawa Ieyasu. Tennji was this final major clash between Ieyasu and Hideyosi, which Ieyasu wins, sealing the deal for the Tokugawa shogunate to take over as the de facto power in Japan, leaving the emperor as less than a figurehead."

What are the biggest misconceptions about samurai?
"There's a very famous book called *Hagakure* ('Hidden By The Leaves') that has this opening line that basically means 'you should think about death every morning and night'. That's where we get this idea in the 20th century of 'death before surrender', but it was actually propaganda used in Japan during World War 2. They wanted to give soldiers this sense of 'you are the modern samurai'. This book came out during the Tokugawa period, but was actually considered extreme – lords who knew about it didn't want their samurai to read it."

What were the biggest factors in the disbandment of the samurai?
"After the Meiji restoration, where they got rid of the Tokugawa shogunate, the oligarchs also got rid of the warrior status. Mostly because it was anachronistic – it was an embarrassment to have guys carrying swords when westerners were around, but also they were expensive to maintain. The government had to pay those warriors; the Meiji government was centralised so they didn't have the domains any more, which meant there weren't local lords looking after and paying their local samurai. They also wanted to get rid of the entrenched interests – the idea that southern samurai would be rivals with northern samurai. One of the most interesting things, though, is that most of those oligarchs would have been samurai caste, but still chose to get rid of it."

Is there anything you could tell us about Eddie purely from looking at his armour on the *Senjutsu* album cover?
"Eddie's armour is basically that of a Tokugawa samurai. The helmet, with the flared 'v' shape would be very typical from the 16th and 17th centuries and would often be used for display rather than actually for battle. The armour itself, however, would be slightly more modern – the late Tokugawa period. Sometimes you'll see dents in the armour because once it was finished they would test it against muskets to see if it would stop a bullet, because older armour wouldn't."

Why do you think samurai capture people's imaginations?
"I think one factor is that samurai existed so close to modernity and there are photos of them, as opposed to something like knights. Plus, the romanisation that they were these warriors with a noble way of living is attractive. But let's face it – the armour, weapons and whatever all look cool too. Eddie looks really cool dressed like a samurai!"

What does the title *Senjutsu* mean in the historical context?
"There are a lot of Chinese characters – kanji – that the Japanese use, but the sounds are the same. 'Sen' can mean 'old man', but it's a different kanji to the 'sen' in 'Senjutsu', where here it basically means 'war'. I read the interview with Bruce Dickinson where he said they had been told it meant 'tactics' or something similar, which when broken apart in that context basically makes it 'the techniques/art of warfare'. There is a word that actually does mean something similar to that in Japanese anyway called 'senryaku', but that tends to be more about long-term planning like supply lines, communication and whatever rather than actual battle strategy."

So there's a risk that one wrong kanji turns it into 'the art of the old man'…
"If they put the wrong one, yeah it'd be 'the art of the wise old man'!"

"THEY MADE FAMILIES CHOOSE BETWEEN FARMING AND FIGHTING"
MICHAEL WERT

LEARN MORE ABOUT SAMURAI THROUGH *SAMURAI – A CONCISE HISTORY* OUT NOW VIA OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS AND *AGE OF SAMURAI: BATTLE FOR JAPAN* OUT NOW VIA NETFLIX

PRESS

ALIEN WEAPONRY

FACE YOUR

PAST

Betrayal. Murder. Cannibalism. Alien Weaponry are forcing people to confront uncomfortable truths about the history of their country. And they're doing it loudly

WORDS: FRASER LEWRY • PICTURES: PIOTR KWASNIK & AARON LEE

When *Metal Hammer* arrives at Christchurch Town Hall, there's a sign on the door. "Due to an injury within the band," it reads, "tonight's Alien Weaponry and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra show has been postponed."

Six hours earlier, Alien Weaponry are gearing up for the second of two shows with the NZSO. Lewis de Jong, the band's young frontman, has hired a scooter. It's one of those things you find in cities all over the world, an app-driven, supposedly under-powered way of getting riders from A to B while making venture capitalists rich. Outside, the weather is apocalyptic and the Meteorological Service Of New Zealand have issued a Red Warning, a status reserved for only the most severe weather events.

You can probably guess what happens next. There's a pole, and a collision, and Lewis lands on his thumb. It breaks. With more notice the show could perhaps have been reconfigured, but there's not enough time. The decision is reluctantly taken to cancel. Eighty musicians return to their hotels, and thousands of fans go home disappointed. "I'll definitely think about my speed in future," says Lewis, somewhat sheepishly.

Storming Hamilton with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

"HE DID IT A FEW TIMES – PLUCKING OUT HIS ENEMIES' EYES AND EATING THEM"

HENRY DE JONG

Six weeks later, *Metal Hammer* catches up with Lewis and his older brother, drummer Henry. The cast has just come off Lewis's hand, and he can get back to the important business of rehearsing for Alien Weaponry's upcoming tour with Gojira. There's also the small business of the band's second album, *Tangaroa*, to attend to. It's an absolute beast of a record, dense with fire and fury, equal parts angst and outrage. Outrage at the industrial-scale depletion of our planet's natural resources. Outrage at long-standing social injustice. And outrage on a more personal level, with unsettling stories of the band's own experiences. There are stories of Māori history and colonial crimes, and there are stories of drug addiction, sexual abuse and personal chaos.

It's also a more technically evolved collection than debut album *Tū*. It's heavier, and more complex, and more surprising. Lewis's vocal on the slow-burning *Unforgiving* could almost be Kurt Cobain at his most despairing. They've sampled The Queen. The stunning *Ihenga* cycles through a number of frankly monstrous riffs and ends with a haunting, hypnotic, choir-like chant sung in te reo Māori [the Māori language]. And lyrically? It. Does. Not. Fuck. About.

It's easy to be suckered by the te reo lyrics, to view them as a tourist might, in the same way the All Blacks' pre-game haka is known throughout the world by people who've probably never given much thought to the tradition's importance in showcasing and celebrating Māori heritage and cultural identity. But dig into the lyrics of *Titokowaru, or Ahi Kā, or Kai Whatu*, and there's a lot going on. A lot to make *Pākehā* (New Zealanders of European descent) feel a degree of deserved discomfort. Discomfort for the way the original colonists treated Māori, and discomfort that not enough is being done to reverse the damage today.

"This is a brutal one," says Henry, when asked about *Kai Whatu*, a look of mischief flickering briefly across his face. "It's about a man called Kereopa Te Rau and a missionary called Carl Völkner. He was stationed at Ōpōtiki [in the 1860s], where he had a church and did missionary work. Kereopa Te Rau and his family also lived in the area, and Kereopa's family were

PIOTR KWASNIK

Henry, Tūranga and Lewis. Thumbs up, Lewis! Oh...

AARON LEE

actually locked inside a burning building by a bunch of colonial forces. He lost his entire family to this fire, to this army coming through and murdering a bunch of people, and he was extremely angry about it.

"Kereopa was part of a guerrilla group called the Pai Mārire. They were sure that Carl Völkner was a spy for the government and that area. So to enact revenge, they kidnapped him, killed him and hung him from a willow tree outside his church and cut his head off and did all sorts of things, drinking his blood and whatnot. They probably ate parts of him, too. Kereopa plucked his eyes out, and made a statement saying that one eye was for The Queen and English rule, and the other was for Parliament. It earned him the nickname 'Kai Whatu', which means 'Eye Eater'. He did it a few more times as well, plucking out his enemies' eyes and eating them as a sign of disrespect. And obviously, you know, you hear the story and it's like, yeah, that just makes a fantastic song."

Stories such as these may feel like remnants of another age, but their ramifications bleed down through the decades. Seven years after Völkner's death, Kereopa Te Rau was found guilty of the murder and hanged, even though there was no direct evidence connecting him to the crime. But he was pardoned as recently as 2014, as part of a Treaty of Waitangi settlement between the British Crown and Ngāti Rangiwewehi, Kereopa's tribe.

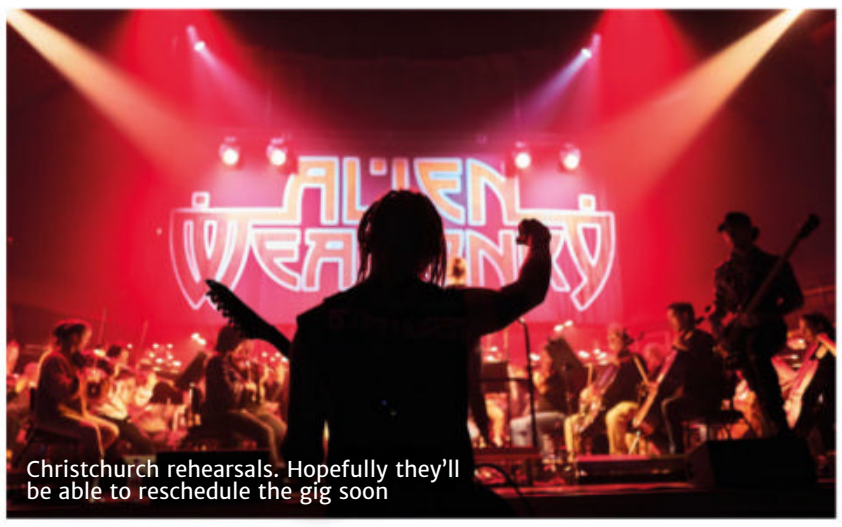
The Treaty is an agreement between The Crown and Māori chiefs. It's New Zealand's founding document, and its interpretation has long been a source of controversy and debate. While a small number of *Pākehā* are willing to address the uncomfortable fact that the land their families may have farmed for generations was handed to their forebears after millions of acres were confiscated from Māori in the 1860s, others, understandably, are reluctant to engage. In a nutshell, they don't want their 'stolen' land 'stolen' back.

This relationship is addressed throughout the album (see A Brief History Of Violence, right, for the story of *Ahi Kā*), making a deep dive into *Tangaroa* as much a history lesson as it is an album designed to have festival audiences the world over bellowing along in te reo, however deep their understanding of the meaning is.

"It's kind of funny," says Henry. "Back in the day Māori were punished for speaking Māori in schools. So to be overseas in some of the countries where those settlers came to New Zealand from, and having people singing in Māori is just really awesome. And a weird juxtaposition."

Tangaroa isn't all eye-eating and colonial misdemeanour (although violence buffs will enjoy opener *Titokowaru*, the story of a great military leader who adopted ritual cannibalism as a way of terrifying his enemy). There's also the title track, named after the god of the ocean in Māori mythology and a plea for ocean cleanliness. It was prompted by the amount of plastic washed up on New Zealand's beaches. And then there's *Dad*, which opens with the sound of a prison door closing and is sung by departed bassist Ethan Trembath.

Hamilton rehearsals in full string – er, swing



Christchurch rehearsals. Hopefully they'll be able to reschedule the gig soon

Neither Lewis nor Henry are particularly comfortable discussing the song as it's so deeply personal – Ethan's father was absent for much of his upbringing – but it's a powerful leaving statement.

The de Jongs could sense Ethan drifting in another direction. He'd missed an American tour in 2018 so he could complete his school exams, and after recording the new album he announced he was leaving the band, partly to spend the kind of time with his family his father never did. "We had kind of seen it happening, over the years," says Henry. "So it was a very gentle letdown for us."

The other personal stories on the album are Lewis's. *Buried Underground* tells the tale of a friend who finds himself institutionalised and battling psychosis after repeated cycles of drug abuse. *Crooked Monsters* features an enraged Lewis singing about a friend who was sexually assaulted on multiple occasions, furious that the perpetrators are free to walk around while their victim suffers the long-term consequences. *Blinded* is about a failed relationship ("teenage

AARON LEE

Playing with an orchestra is metal

"PEOPLE AT SCHOOL USED TO TREAT ME LIKE SHIT"

LEWIS DE JONG

angsty stuff," mocks older brother Henry, rather gently).

Henry is 21, the elder brother by just two years, but the differences between the two are marked. Henry seems wiser, more studious, and more comfortable, whereas Lewis (still a teenager) is a more reluctant speaker. But he bristles with excitement when talking about these songs and how much they mean to him.

Take album closer *Down The Rabbit Hole*. "During high school people used to basically treat me like shit and say a bunch of fucked-up shit to me," says Lewis. "I was kind of the punching bag of the school. These days, those people are messaging me, congratulating me, wanting to be my friends, trying to jump on the bandwagon because I'm going somewhere. It's kind of a kind of a 'fuck you' to them, and also kind of a 'you made me who I am' to them, because I probably wouldn't have the drive I do if it wasn't for that stuff."

"He left school saying, 'Fuck you guys, I'm off to tour Europe', which I think is pretty cool," adds Henry.

And that's Alien Weaponry in 2021. They're heading off on tour with Gojira in October. New bassist Tūranga Morgan-Edmonds will be playing abroad with the band for the first time. They're hoping to reschedule that orchestra show in Christchurch (an earlier date, in Hamilton, did go ahead, with a frenzied moshpit in front of the flutes and violas). They've appeared as the guest band on comedian Bill Bailey's NZ TV show *Patriot Brains*. And in *Tangaroa* they've made one of the finest, fiercest, albums of the year. And it's one hell of an education. H

TANGAROA IS OUT SEPTEMBER 17 VIA NAPALM. ALIEN WEAPONRY TOUR THE UK WITH GOJIRA NEXT YEAR

PIOTR KWASNIK

A BRIEF HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Inside the story of the Ngti Whtua village, as told on *Ahi Kā* ('Fires Of Occupation')

THE BACKGROUND
The Treaty of Waitangi was intended to prevent the sale of Māori land to colonial forces from European countries not associated with The Crown, but what it didn't do was protect that land from the Crown itself. Within a century of the treaty's signing, millions of acres of Māori land had been sold, occupied or confiscated.

THE STORY
The land at Bastion Point in Auckland originally belonged to the Ngāti Whātua o Ōrākei tribe, but was reduced in size over the decades through purchase and annexation. In 1952, Auckland Council burned the Ngāti Whātua village at Okahu Bay, west of Bastion Point, to the ground, as the Commonwealth's new monarch, Elizabeth II, was due to drive past and the settlement was considered "unsightly". Inhabitants were evicted and forced to pay rent elsewhere, sending many into grinding poverty.

THE SONG
Ahi Kā begins with a speech originally given by Ngāti Whātua chief Te Kawau, and ends with a recording of The Queen explaining how much "at home" she feels in Auckland. In between, the devastating story of the burning and eviction is told.

THE AFTERMATH
In 1976, New Zealand Prime Minister Robert Muldoon announced that the land at Bastion Point would be sold to property developers. Protesters occupied the site for 506 days before being brutally evicted by army and police, their buildings and food supplies destroyed. Just 11 years later, the New Zealand Government returned the land to Ngāti Whātua, paying $3million in compensation.

SERVICE WITH

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT
PICTURES: ANDY FORD

A SMILE

Surviving the collapse of their label amidst sexual assault allegations against its owner, Employed To Serve have made an album that is a) feelgood as hell and b) metal as *fuck*

On Thursday 27 June, 2019, Employed To Serve stepped onto Glastonbury's Scum stage for the most unexpected set of their career. "Glastonbury was a huge one. It wasn't even on my bucket list because I didn't think it would be possible, being a heavy band," enthuses vocalist Justine Jones.

"It really went off," adds guitarist Sammy Urwin. "It wasn't just like a bunch of people came in and watched us politely with their arms folded. It was one of the best festival appearances we did that year."

Sharing Glasto's Shangri-La area with the likes of Denzel Curry, Gojira and Venom Prison, Woking's metallic hardcore quintet were part of a collection of artists pushing the boundaries of heavy music, and keen to bring it to the mainstream. The show indicated that they were growing in stature; they ended the year supporting Bury Tomorrow and had big plans for 2021. Then the pandemic hit.

Like other bands, Employed To Serve had their ambitious touring schedule cut short. Plans to play Europe and America, before sub-headlining the Avalanche Stage at Download, were unceremoniously shelved for the foreseeable future. Things were looking so grim, there was only one thing for it: they would write a new album, *Conquering*, and manifest their goliath musical vision.

Quickly, the writing process became a turbulent one. Last Autumn, allegations of sexual harassment were made against Alex Fitzpatrick, owner of Holy Roar records, the band's previous label and where Justine worked as label manager. Alex has denied the allegations.

Most of Holy Roar's roster immediately cut ties with the label, including Justine, who had played an integral part in shaping its identity. "It put me in a bad place. There's no skirting around it; I still feel upset and I don't think it will ever fade," she explains. "But, Holy Roar was bigger than just one person. It was the whole team behind it, it was the scene and it was the fans. It was a collective and, in my eyes, it always will be."

Many of the bands involved with Holy Roar were long-time friends of ETS, so in an attempt to salvage some upcoming releases, Justine reignited Church Road Records, the distro label that Sammy created in 2017. Getting a label up and running in a couple of weeks was intense, but Justine helped release the biggest albums of some bands' careers: Svalbard's *When I Die, Will I Get Better?*, Palm Reader's *Sleepless* and Respire's *Black Line*, which are still going into multiple pressings.

"There was no point where I was like, 'Let's not do this anymore,'" says Justine, "Especially now when the music scene has been devastated by COVID, I think it's more important that there are people like us there to get new bands through and grow them."

Considering the events of the last year and a half, *Conquering* is an apt statement of intent from musicians who seem to be entering the PMA era of their careers. In addition to starting a label and writing music last year, Justine and Sammy (who married late in 2019) released *Unashamed*, the first EP from their posi-core side-project, Glorious, and are bringing ferociously upbeat positivity to ETS's fourth album. Packing mighty battlecries, livewire grooves and a triumphant attitude throughout, this is an album about storming into a brighter future with your devil horns raised high.

"It's so easy to let anger get the better of you, and this is an album about self-empowerment. It's about conquering yourself," says Sammy. "I think the MO came from that feeling you get when you listen to our favourite bands like Slipknot and Hatebreed. You put them on and feel so much better for it."

"I STILL FEEL UPSET AND I DON'T THINK IT WILL EVER FADE"

JUSTINE JONES, VOCALS

ETS have recreated the fist-pumping empowerment of these bands by embracing a more instantaneous, straight-ahead metallic sound. Album opener *Universal Chokehold* builds slowly and features violins, before the band come barrelling in with Trivium-esque flair and crushing vocals. It's a polished beginning, demonstrating that ETS can maintain their fighting-talk ruggedness while crafting bold statements of intent.

It's the latest step for a band who have always been comfortable with progression. They started off as Botch-inspired violent hardcore upstarts, and then incorporated nu metal stompiness. "Our first albums ▶

Justine Jones: badass frontwoman and label boss

PRACTISE WHAT YOU PREACH

We asked Justine to pick out some of the bands she's most excited about on Church Road Records

BLODET
"First up is Sweden's Blodet! The band have an awesome post-metal vibe about them that draws influences from the likes of early Amenra, Swans and Breach. They're releasing their EP, *Vision*, on September 24. The band have already played shows with Refused and Cult Of Luna, so I think they will be a fan favourite in no time at all!"

CELESTIAL SANCTUARY
"Say hello to the New Wave Of British Death Metal! They first came to our attention after their *Mass Extinction* demo. We instantly fell in love with them, as they're breathing new life into the old-school death metal sound, just like the likes of Bolt Thrower and their contemporaries Tomb Mold and Of Feather And Bone. We released their new album, *Soul Diminished*, in early 2021, and the band are already on their second pressing."

ANTETHIC
"I've been a fan of this band since their [2017] album, *Ghost Shirt Society*. The band were more post-rock leaning back then, and have since evolved into the electronic powerhouse that they are today. We released their *Mythographer B-sides* in July, which is a remix of their *Mythographer* album that came out during the pandemic in 2020. The band have these awesome soundscapes and textures that are similar to the likes of Boards Of Canada, Blanck Mass and Health."

VOICES
"We've known these guys for a very long time from them playing in the legendary Akercocke. We're releasing their album, *Breaking The Trauma Bond*, in November, and it's honestly incredible. The band have managed to make a post-punk-influenced black/death metal album that melds influences ranging from Nick Cave, Killing Joke and Siouxsie And The Banshees all the way to Birmingham extreme metallers Anaal Nathrakh. They wrote all of the orchestra and soundscape parts themselves and it sounds amazing. I can't wait for everyone to hear it!"

had the very British trait where you're a bit of everything," explains Justine. "We were too hardcore for the metal kids and too metal for the hardcore kids, whereas with *Conquering* we're more definitive with what we are."

"With this record, we wanted to flex our influences that come from a more traditionally metal background," explains Sammy. "Like old-school Machine Head, Lamb Of God, and thrash influences from Exodus and Testament. We've put our own spin on it, but we want to sit more neatly there and tour with bands in that world."

Alongside this increase in melody, Sammy has taken on vocal duties, introducing more cleans and allowing for call-and response vocal parts. It's most intense on *Exist*, which features the *'This is hell'* vocal refrain they got the crowd to sing at Download Pilot this year. Both musicians maintain it's the best example of where the band are in 2021. "*Exist* has a bit of everything," says Justine, before Sammy adds: "…It's a little bit of who we've been before, and it's a good song to represent where we're going."

Metal doesn't get much bigger than *Exist*, and it was modelled on the best. "The bands I grew up listening to, they bring you in, and then you go back to it and it's still heavy. Songs like *Sad But True* by Metallica; they're catchy and heavy as shit," says Sammy.

"They look and sound metal but they don't alienate people," adds Justine. "I think stuff like that is important for metal to be in the limelight again. You don't ever want to be a metal band that doesn't sound metal; you want to maintain the heavy edge but be accessible."

"WE'RE MOVING METAL INTO 2021"

JUSTINE JONES, VOCALS

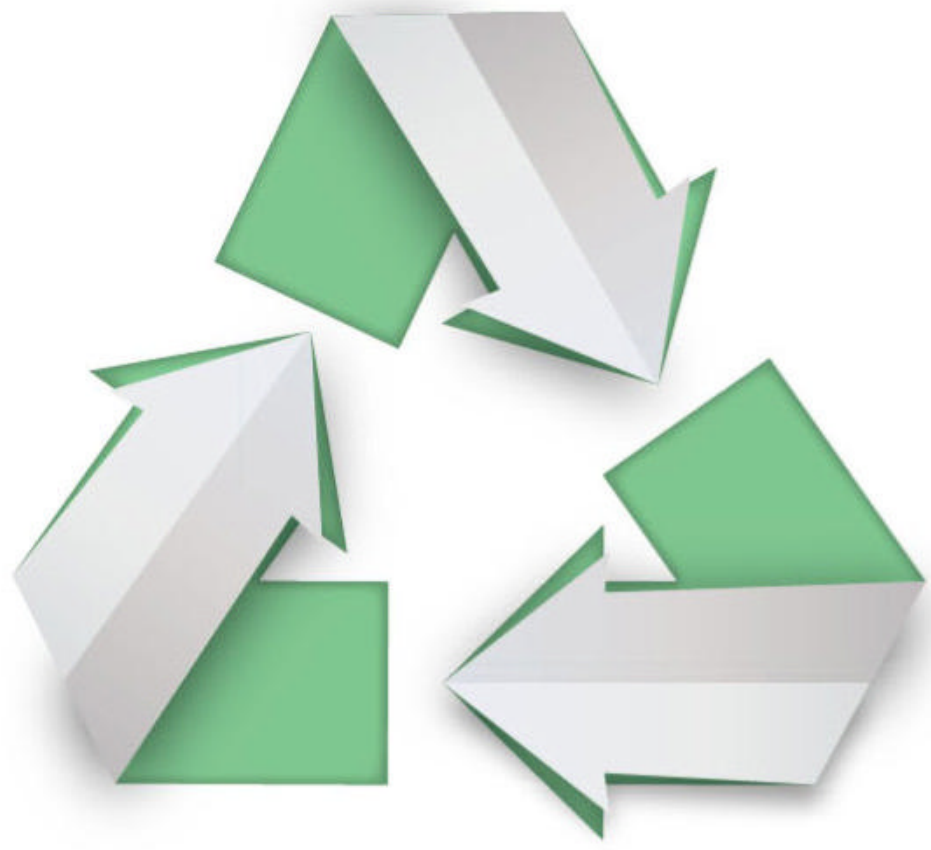
When it comes to accessibility, not only are ETS emulating icons such as Slipknot and Hatebreed, they're embracing a new generation of artists who are happy to blur genre boundaries. Last year, they collaborated with hyper-animated rap mega-star Ashnikko on a transformed cover of her hit song *Cry*, which showcased them to a young, open-minded audience. "I think it's important that people do what they want with the genre. We want to leave ourselves open to do things like the Ashnikko song. Keep an open mind while waving a flag for the dirty grungers," grins Sammy.

Likewise, Justine aspires to help end metal gatekeeping and make the genre accessible. "It's about moving metal into 2021. It's inclusive and everyone's invited to listen to our band," she says.

The *Conquering* album cycle is set to expose more people than ever to ETS. Next year, they're even supporting Gojira in arenas – a well-deserved opportunity to continue their rise from the underground. Could *Conquering* be their equivalent of an *Iowa, Perseverance* or *The Blackening*? We wouldn't bet against music this monumental. H

***CONQUERING* IS OUT SEPTEMBER 17 VIA SPINEFARM. EMPLOYED TO SERVE SUPPORT GOJIRA IN THE UK IN MARCH 2022**

Employed To Serve (left to right): Sammy Urwin, Nathan Pryor, Justine Jones, David Porter, Casey McHale



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THE COLOUR OF MAGIC

Alright, we all love *T2*, but *Speed 2? Blade III? Son Of The Mask?!* Most sequels are shit! So what's possessed Between The Buried And Me to write one to a classic?

WORDS: ALEC CHILLINGWORTH • PICTURES: JUAN PARDO

BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME

Sometimes, the sequel is better than the original. *Aliens. Back To The Future Part II. The Dark Knight*.

"*The Godfather Part II*, of course," adds Between The Buried And Me's bassist, Dan Briggs. He's chilling in the North Carolina sun as we talk online. Lucky git.

"That's actually my favourite *Godfather* movie," says Tommy Rogers, BTBAM's singer and keys player. He's getting ready for a flight, probably somewhere hot. Lucky git. "That's what we're trying to do here, ha!"

Hopefully he means they've created a follow-up album that lives up to its source material, rather than shooting someone in the back of the head on a fishing trip. Given the quality of *Colors II*, BTBAM's 10th record and thematic follow-up to 2007's critically acclaimed *Colors*, we're guessing so.

Born in something of a pressure bubble, *Colors* was BTBAM's fourth full-length and the sound of them spreading their wings to make a statement. That might seem like press release guff, but it's true – the band were disenfranchised and burnt out.

They'd spent a summer sticking out like a sore bum on the 2006 Ozzfest tour, turning out mid-morning slots across the US to a few rows of kids who were just waiting for Atreyu or something. Frustrated, and probably a bit hangry – the tour didn't cater to BTBAM's majority-vegan diet – they set out to make some of the most bizarre, uniquely skewed slices of heaviness committed to tape. Something so weird, so catchy, so packed full of genuine moments, it couldn't be sidelined.

Colors went down as a classic and firmly established the band as forerunners in modern progressive music, shortly joined by the likes of Periphery and Tesseract. Daddies of the genre such as Dream Theater and Coheed And Cambria were taking them out on tour. BTBAM had scribbled with the perfect shade. So why now for the sequel? Why risk making a *Speed 2* or *Son Of The Mask*?

"Blake [Richardson, drummer] had the idea, more as a cool way to get fans hyped up," explains Tommy. "We were initially on the fence. Some of us, in the back of our minds, were like, 'This might not work, we might have to change our plan.' But the more we thought about it, we thought about why we wrote *Colors*. We were at a crossroads as a band – we were figuring out our identity."

"We did a 10-year anniversary tour of *Colors* in 2017, and I think it was just burning in people's brains," says Dan. "When the idea came up, the main thing for me was: I have no interest in writing music that sounds like it came out in 2007."

Colors II doesn't sound like that at all. It's the same band, all grown up, still playing a genreless blend you can't really label. "Now we're older, we call it 'heavy yacht rock'," quips Tommy, playing off their original description of *Colors* as 'new wave polka grunge'.

And with that age comes maturity. Where *Colors* was conceived in what Dan describes as "shared misery", its successor came from… well, you know what's been going on for the past year and a half. Given that BTBAM are famed for concept albums – the Parallax narrative, for example, ran through multiple releases across a decade – it would've been easy to frame *Colors II* as a knackered, clichéd old parable for 'these strange times'. You could certainly assume so with lead single *Fix The Error*: a concise, five-minute chronicle where a guy quits his job in a dystopian metropolis, hellbent on taking down the corporation that ruined his life for so long. Fuck the man, man.

"Before we even started talking about this new album, I was burned out on writing concept records," says Tommy. "I was dreading, like… I gotta figure out another story! It was what was expected of me at that point. Small stories do take place within the album, like *Fix The Error*. But there's a lot of personal shit."

Personal shit?

"Like struggling with the idea of constant death on our minds," he continues. "Last year was the most any of us have ever considered death like that. It's a huge possibility and can happen just like that. I think about it a lot, just because I'm super-paranoid and freaked out about the idea of death. The lyrics are all over the place at times, but I wanted it to be genuine."

> **"WE'RE TRYING TO DO A *GODFATHER PART II* HERE!"**
> TOMMY ROGERS

Lines such as, *'We didn't live, we only existed'*, from *Revolution In Limbo*, hit particularly hard. But this is, after all, a BTBAM release. It's emotional, yes. It's also completely batty. *Prehistory*'s Hammond-organish, folk metal intro sounds like it was ripped straight from a mid-90s PlayStation game – and that's before the *actual Crash Bandicoot samples* appear over a finger-snapping, ragtime mid-section.

"Things just kept getting added to that part," says Tommy. "Then the last time I heard it, I was like, 'Oh, there's a bunch of cartoon shit. That's cool.' That happens a lot."

Little glimmers of *Colors* rear their heads across the record's 78-minute duration, but it's not Bullet For My Valentine doing *Tears Don't Fall (Part 2)*. It's all artfully crafted, with tiny leitmotifs and themes trickling down for the keen-eared fan to scoop up, arranged with a Devin Townsendian knack for melody within madness.

"One of the first ideas I had was doing a whole shuffle song based around just one part from *Ants Of The Sky* [from *Colors*], which became *Bad Habits*," says Dan. "We play the riff from *Ants Of The Sky* in the middle of that song – the whole song is just variations on a shuffle because of that fuckin' part!"

"I repeat *'Sleep on, fly on'* [originally from *Ants Of The Sky*] there, too," adds Tommy. "The way the album flows, especially towards the end, where you have the segue [the instrumental *Sfumato*] right before the last track – it's a similar vibe from *Viridian* to *White Walls* on *Colors*. Blake even does the same drum rhythm going in. And the way *Monochrome* goes into *The Double Helix Of Extinction* is very similar to how the first *Colors* opens."

There's even some sweet I-O-Us from one *Colors* to another. Mike Portnoy, the drum legend who played with Dream Theater in 2007, loved BTBAM so much the first time round, he lends a solo to *Fix The Error*.

Between The Buried And Me (left to right):
Back row: Dan Briggs, Dustie Waring, Tommy Rogers.
Front row: Paul Waggoner, Blake Richardson

Music that really shouldn't work, live! BTBAM at Charlotte Motor Speedway, North Carolina, in May 2016

Clearly, the record resonated with people – the band played it in full once for their *Colors_LIVE* DVD in 2008, and again on the 10th anniversary trek. Given their current US tour comprises a greatest hits set followed by a play-through of their fifth album, *The Great Misdirect*... how about a *Colors/Colors II* tour? Or is that too much of a ballache?

"Ha! That's a good way to describe it," says Dan. "A ballache! I was so fucking dead at the end of the *Colors_LIVE* show – I couldn't move the next day. I was just curled up in the back of the van. We were all just like, 'Man, can you believe we did that? Never again.' Now we're about to go play for two and a half hours every night! As old men!"

While a *Colors* double-bill won't happen for the sake of BTBAM's brittle bones, it is worth noting that the *Great Misdirect* shows were originally announced last year to celebrate the band's 20th birthday. After two decades of music that really shouldn't work, music that still stretches the boundaries of metal to such a perverse extent, it almost seems flippant just calling them 'metal'.

"We were coming out of the hardcore and metal world," finishes Dan. "Throwing a bluegrass part into a song just was not normal back then."

Fourteen years on, it still isn't normal, mate.

"THEY ADDED A BUNCH OF CARTOON SHIT!"

TOMMY ROGERS

***COLORS II* IS OUT ON AUGUST 20 VIA SUMERIAN**

SEQUELS EQUAL TO THE PREQUEL

Three 'sequel' albums that do the source material proud

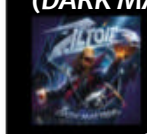
MEAT LOAF
(BAT OUT OF HELL II: BACK INTO HELL, 1993)

1977's *Bat Out Of Hell* is one of the biggest, unnecessarily dramatic exercises in stadium rock ever recorded. Even today, it sounds ludicrous. With Meat's popularity in the pits following a few stinkers, songwriter Jim Steinman dug into the *Bat* mindset and birthed a sequel of Wagnerian, nigh-on biblical proportions. Despite being released at the height of grunge, *Bat Out Of Hell II* was a hit. Fangtastic.

DREAM THEATER
(METROPOLIS PT 2: SCENES FROM A MEMORY, 1999)

Dream Theater's second LP, *Images And Words*, harboured one track in particular that piqued fans' interest: *Metropolis – Part 1: "The Miracle And The Sleeper"*. *Part 2* arrived seven years later in the form of, well, an entire album. Split into two acts and spilling over 77 minutes, it's routinely cited as one of the finest progressive metal records of all time.

DEVIN TOWNSEND
(DARK MATTERS, 2014)



The same year BTBAM released *Colors*, Devin Townsend was adjusting to life off the road as a new dad. He'd disbanded his troupe of extreme metallers, Strapping Young Lad, and written *Ziltoid The Omniscient* – an album about a caffeine-crazed alien who'd stop at nothing to find the universe's ultimate cup of coffee. Sure. Seven years later, he expanded the Ziltoid lore with *Dark Matters*, introducing new characters, creatures that look like farting ballsacks, and a West End flair with songs such as *March Of The Poozers*.

GETTY

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THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

JEFF WALKER

Played on *Red Dwarf*. Namechecked on *Friends*. Responsible for nu metal?! Whether you're a diehard fan or death metal noob, chances are there's still plenty about Carcass you don't know. Frontman Jeff reveals all…

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: ESTER SEGARRA

Few people do dry irony like Jeff Walker. Carcass's singer and bassist has just been recounting the tale of their 1996 album, *Swansong*, a record that could've fallen into a major label black hole if they hadn't wriggled out of their deal. "It could still be gathering dust on a shelf," he says. "Some people wish it was."

This arched-eyebrow view of the world in general and the music business in particular has served him well since co-founding Carcass with guitarist Bill Steer and original drummer Ken Owen in 1986. The Merseyside band's initial trajectory saw them transform from pathology-fixated grindcore malcontents to major label death metal powerhouse, before a sudden split in 1996 brought it all screeching to a halt. Yet absence makes the myocardium grow fonder, and a 2008 reunion saw Carcass greeted like returning heroes.

While the band's post-comeback work-rate has been slower than before – upcoming album *Torn Arteries* is their second since reforming – Carcass's status as one of the most influential bands of the last three decades is unassailable. "We're just some death metal band," says their never-knowingly-overstated frontman. "That's all we ever wanted to be."

What band made you want to do this?
"Probably the Sex Pistols. They were the first band I got into when I was nine or ten. They were brilliant. I didn't think, 'This is a punk band.' They were just playing rock'n'roll."

What was your first band?
"I joined a band called Bomb Culture around 1985. It was very 80s, very post-punk – synths and drum machines. Then I joined [crust-punks] Electro Hippies for a bit before I got kicked out."

How did your parents react when you said you wanted to be a musician?
"There wasn't a conversation. I get on great with my parents, but they knew fuck all about my bands until Carcass were on MTV in the 90s. Then suddenly they're proud. But when you're a long-haired layabout doing fuck all, they're not so proud."

The underground British punk and metal scene back then seemed to exist in its own universe. What was it like being part of that?
"It was just people who wanted to be in bands for the sake of it. Most people were realistic – if you wanted to be in a band, you were going to have to rough it. Nowadays, nobody wants to work for it – everybody wants to be on TikTok and make money. Nobody's happy just going to concerts, everybody wants to be on the stage."

According to Wikipedia, you were a hunt saboteur. Is that true?
"There was a time in my teenage years when I was involved in that stuff, but that was it. Don't get me wrong, I've got no sympathy with hunts, but I'm a bit more laidback about these things now. You can't spend your whole life being angry – you get burnt out. You realise out of frustration that you can't win. Things do change and they will change, but they change gradually. It takes decades. I don't think you get anywhere by ranting at people."

You ended up joining Bill's band, Disattack, which turned into Carcass.
"I used to see Bill at the local record store, Probe – this guy with long hair and a blue car coat. I met Ken at some hardcore gig. He always struck me as a bit fucking mad. Bill had a denim jacket with Venom and Slayer patches sewn neatly on the back. Ken had this cut-off battle jacket with the names of every band he liked scrawled on it in marker pen, like the wall of an asylum. That summed up their personalities."

"I EMAILED THE PRODUCER FROM *FRIENDS* TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED"

JEFF WALKER

You've said you never wanted to be the singer in Carcass. What went wrong?
"We did a demo with our original singer, Sanjiv, but then we parted ways. We were on the way to record the first album [1988's *Reek Of Putrefaction*] and we just decided to divvy up the vocals. In my head, Bill was always going to be the main singer, but then me and Ken carved it up with him. After that, one by one people dropped out. It was difficult for Ken to sing and play the drums, and having a singing drummer never looks good anyway. With Bill, he just lost enthusiasm. But Bill never seems to have enthusiasm for much."

***Reek Of Putrefaction* is a grindcore classic, but you've been really dismissive of it. Why?**
"It's a sonic abortion. The production is shit. I'd like to re-record it, just to prove that it could be a really killer album, 'cos there's some good riffs on it. With [1989's] *Symphonies Of Sickness*, we were basically remaking that first album, 'cos it was such a disappointment. And by the time we made *Necroticism* [1991's *Necroticism – Descanting The Insalubrious*] we were no longer seen as this crusty grind band, we were seen as a metal band. I remember our old manager saying, 'Yeah, my favourite period was before you were this lame metal band.' Maybe he was right."

No other band had lyrics like Carcass: graphic descriptions of medical and pathological procedures. Was there a political subtext, or were you just trying to gross people out?
"We were pushing back against what was dumb in metal. There were other bands singing about gore and horrible things back then, but it was cartoonish. We wanted to show the reality and shock people. No, not shock them – *disturb them*. And we definitely wanted to get the album banned: [original label] Earache press up 1,000 copies, it gets banned, sells out and becomes a cult album. That's all we wanted."

How did that work out for you?
"It didn't, did it? Nothing ever works out for us."

Have you met any doctors or surgeons who were inspired by Carcass?
"Yeah, actually. Doctors, pathologists, vets, people who work in funeral parlours. We're only talking a handful of people, but if it only inspires one person and makes them want to become a doctor, that's fucking brilliant. It's probably the most positive impact I've had on anyone in my life."

It sounds weird now, but back then you were the poster band for vegetarianism in metal. Were you comfortable with that?
"I don't think we were. We didn't want to go on about it. When [US label] Combat were releasing *Symphonies*, they really wanted to make a big deal out of it. We thought it was stupid and pushed back against it, but we should have used it as an angle. Imagine how we feel now, seeing all these bands making a big fucking deal about it."

You and Bill were in the TV sitcom *Red Dwarf* in 1989, playing members of the fictional band Smeg And The Heads. How did you end up doing that?
"[*Red Dwarf* star] Craig Charles got into Napalm Death for some reason, and he wanted them to go on *Red Dwarf*. But Shane [Embury] and Mick [Harris] from Napalm didn't want to do it. So we were kind of the last resort."

What do you remember about filming it?
"It was great. They pick you up in a taxi, drive you there, you get paid. I think we got 300 quid each, which is more than we earned at any of our gigs."

The *Red Dwarf* appearance was weird, but not as weird as being name-checked by Phoebe in an episode of *Friends* years later…
"Somebody had tipped us off, so I was watching it at the time. And before the programme, the person who was introducing it over the old Channel 4 logo goes, 'And now Phoebe fancies a bit of Carcass…' or something. I was, like, 'What the fuck is going on?' I never found out why. I even emailed the producer from *Friends* years later to find out, but he was none the wiser. If they wanted a high-profile act, they wouldn't have picked frigging Carcass."

Was it tough going being a member of Carcass in the early days?
"Nah. We never had any grand ideas. We never thought we were the next Metallica. By the third album we managed to start scraping money together. But you're just talking about replacing dole money with what little income you got from the band."

Your fourth album, *Heartwork*, was the point where people really started to take notice. What was that like?
"Earache had licensed that album to Sony/Columbia in America, and it sold something like 70,000 copies in its first year. Nowadays a band would fucking kill to sell that many, but back then it meant fuck all. We failed on Sony. The first album we actually recorded for them was [1996's] *Swansong*, and we managed to get ourselves dropped before it came out."

What happened?
"We were out of contract with Earache, so we signed direct with Sony. We were on the front page of the *Liverpool Echo*, saying we were going to earn $7million from the deal – as if! But towards the end of the session, we could see that labels were starting to get cold feet about metal; big bands were getting dropped. We asked our A&R guy if we could get dropped. He knew the label wasn't interested in us, so he negotiated it. They paid us to get out of our contract without releasing the album."

How much did you walk away with?
"The advance for the first album was probably £100,000. We had some money left over from that to live on, and I think they gave us another £10,000 just to fuck off. And then

Jeff Walker: reluctant legend

Earache picked up the album and paid us more money to release it."

Carcass split up before *Swansong* came out. What happened?
"Bill left. If he hadn't, I probably would have. After the Sony thing, it was, 'Where do we go now?' Bill was getting into other stuff, and I was as well. We were starting to get sick of the sight of each other. The fun had dwindled. We just couldn't see a future in doing it."

Was there a big bust up?
"No. No heated fight or any of that bollocks. Just a quiet understanding that things had run their course."

After the band split, you and Ken formed the more straightforward Blackstar. Did you think, 'I'm Jeff Walker from Carcass, this is going to be massive right out of the gate'?
"No. I figured I had one more album in me [1997's *Barbed Wire Soul*]. Blackstar was done purely for fun. It was out of step with what people wanted, but I was doing what I wanted. I wasn't interested in playing 1,000mph at that point."

In 1999, Ken had an aneurysm and almost died. It must have been difficult seeing him go through that.
"You underestimate what a cold-hearted bastard I am. Obviously it was upsetting seeing him at death's door. But he's a tough bastard and he pulled through. I mean, what do you expect me to say? Yeah, it was upsetting."

Did you get any offers to join big-name metal bands during that period?
"I did get the odd phone call. Morbid Angel's manager asked if I was interested in flying out to Florida 'cos David Vincent had left that band. I was, like, 'No, you're alright mate.' Why would I want to go from Carcass to another band in that style?"

Carcass reunited in 2008. Unfinished business or just a big payday?
"I saw Emperor playing in LA and I texted Bill, saying: 'I don't mean to be rude, but we really should think about reforming Carcass.' I'd been playing with Brujeria and promoters were asking me about Carcass. That's where I was coming from: 'Why am I being a hired gun when there's a demand for my own band?' Mike [Amott, former Carcass/current Arch Enemy guitarist] was hitting us up as well – I think people were bugging him about us as well. So me and him started bugging Bill about it. We were getting offers for money that we'd never seen in our lives. We didn't realise how important the band had been to people."

Carcass in Mexico City, 1992 (left to right): Jeff Walker, Michael Amott, Ken Owen, Bill Steer

"I'M LIKE LARS ULRICH... AN ANNOYING TWAT"
JEFF WALKER

How would you describe your relationship with Bill?
"We both bring something out in each other that makes Carcass work. It's a Hetfield-Ulrich situation. You can see the dynamic with those two guys – they don't really love each other, but they're codependent. Hetfield brings something to the table that Ulrich can't, and the other way round. That's like me and Bill."

Which one of you is James and which one is Lars?
"Bill is Hetfield, 'cos of his rhythm playing, and I'm Ulrich because I'm more business-orientated and I've got more drive. And I'm an annoying twat."

Who's the most unlikely Carcass fan you've ever met?
"I remember years ago reading in a magazine that Tom Hanks used to have parties in Beverley Hills, and that he used to play *Reek Of Putrefaction* to his friends. Maybe some softarse got it wrong and they meant [reputed death metal fan] Jim Carrey. Or maybe my memory has just made it up."

Carcass are part of the metal establishment these days. Do you ever wonder how the hell that happened?
"The narcissist in me assumes it was my destiny. But I think because we did something different, we obviously had an impact on people and on other bands. We don't get credit for it, but hey, that's just tough shit."

Does that annoy you?
"It only narks you if someone else takes the credit. We downtuned to B and we kind of introduced that to the world of metal, as far as I'm concerned. There probably was somebody else who tuned to B, but I can't think of anyone. It had some disastrous side effects, such as nu metal."

Are you taking the credit for nu metal?
"In some respects, we kind of are responsible. They all worked with Ross Robinson, and he was a Carcass fan. A lot of those bands tuned to B. But they don't know why they're doing it half the time."

Have you got any more Carcass albums in you, or are you happy to just coast towards retirement?
"I think this new album is coasting, don't you?"

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PRESS/FAITH CRAWFORD

HEALTH HAVE PISSED OFF THE HIPSTERS

But that's fine: these industrial noise-makers belong to us now, courtesy of some wild experimentation, a little luck and the patronage of one Trent Reznor

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN

If you'd turned up at East Hollywood's Il Corral club on a Monday night in 2005, you would have witnessed carnage. A fixture on LA's underground noise and experimental scene, its crowds were as unpredictable, loud and aggressive as the bands onstage.

"There was a rope swing in the middle of the show floor, that was connected to a rafter on the ceiling," remembers Health frontman Jacob Duzsik, who played there. "And when things would really heat up, someone would just go and stand on a seven-foot window ledge, and then Tarzan-swing into the circle-pit and double-kick people in the back. It was like *Mad Max*."

Illegal shows took place in squats, where people would play 'free noise' – improvisational compositions, sometimes bolstered by circuit-bent instruments. It was a far cry from the more arty, serious noise scenes in New York and London, says Jacob, and it was only a matter of time before the rest of the world noticed.

"We knew from underground touring the country that something really unique was happening in LA. We kinda all predicted, 'This is going to blow up in the press. Particularly hipster, indie, *Pitchfork* press,'" remembers Jacob. "It was too cool. And that is what really allowed us to have a career."

Health, now working on their sixth studio album, might have been given a leg up by the hipster press, but their dark sound and aesthetic was often at odds with the other bands it covered. You might remember them touring with Nine Inch Nails in 2008, a year after the release of their self-titled debut album. Or you might have heard the ominous, disquieting soundtrack they wrote for blockbuster videogame *Max Payne 3* in 2012.

More recently, metal's ears pricked up with 2019's atmospheric, industrial *Vol 4: Slaves Of Fear* (title inspired by Sabbath's fourth album), and 2020's *Disco4: Part 1*, a collaborations album featuring some of their most respected peers. This year, they've released songs with Deftones' Chino Moreno (*Anti-Life*, for DC's *Dark Nights: Death Metal Soundtrack*), and Nine Inch Nails (*Isn't Everyone*). At France's Hellfest next summer, they're on the same stage as Trent Reznor and co, plus Ministry, Skinny Puppy and Killing Joke.

"What's so exciting is that there are these overlapping areas of music – that's what's so freeing about the internet, because people's niches have become less tribalistic, and so there's this cross-pollination now," enthuses Jacob. "Dudes at Hellfest can headbang to Perturbator just playing this heavy-ass synth music, and it doesn't feel out of place."

Health began as the brainchild of Seattle transplant Jacob and bassist John Famiglietti, his colleague at Hollywood's uncool, touristy and "garish and gaudy" Guitar Center. Teaming up with Jacob's housemate, Jupiter Keyes, on guitars/synths (who would leave the band in 2015) and drummer BJ Miller (recruited via Craigslist), they set to work making music that sounded like it belonged in the gnarly venues and warehouses of downtown LA.

Driven by one-upping the experimentalism and incendiary performances of their peers, they devised something called the 'zoothorn', named after Captain Beefheart guitarist Zoot Horn Rollo. They would mic up their instruments and run the microphone through a pedal chain, creating cacophonous feedback and loops. It was weird noise, for sure, but created in a more controlled manner.

"You'd see people do *all kinds* of crazy shit. Like circuit bent instruments, or something that they would make for one show and then break," recalls Jacob. "We were excited by that. We were trying to figure out: how do we integrate something from that perspective into the traditional band set-up, but use it in songs that are composed, not improvisational?"

With little money in their pockets, they recorded their abrasive, echoey, self-titled debut album at grungy LA club The Smell during daylight hours, rats emerging from under the stage. Nevertheless, it caught the ear of Trent Reznor, who invited them on tour. Health were incredulous and nervous – especially once the run began, and the crowds booed them every night. Trent soon pulled them aside. Jacob panicked. Were they going to get kicked off?

"THEY WOULD SWING INTO THE CIRCLE-PIT AND DOUBLE-KICK PEOPLE IN THE BACK"

JACOB DUZSIK

Luckily, Trent had figured out the problem; from their vantage point below the nine-foot arena stages, people couldn't clearly see what was going on with the zoothorns, so he offered Health the opportunity to use Nine Inch Nails' state-of-the-art LED screens. "To let an unknown fucking noise band that's pissing off your fans use these multi-million dollar things that you're having to employ people to build and calibrate… it's just unheard of," Jacob marvels, still bowled over by the generosity.

But there was more excitement to come. Health released follow-up album *Get Color* in 2009, and then the music department at Rockstar Games got wind of them, inviting them to score the tense bits of multimillion-dollar videogame *Max Payne 3*. They ended up scoring the whole thing – much to the disappointment of some of their fans.

Health (left to right): Jacob Duzsik, BJ Miller, John Famiglietti

"We lived in this underground music, Pitchfork world, where the question still seemed really pertinent to people: is this selling out? Is it not cool to do this?" explains Jacob. "With hindsight, it seems preposterous. We didn't care."

Max Payne 3 didn't just raise Health's profile, it set them on a new sonic trajectory. They'd gone from "lazy young dudes, getting fucked up or whatever" to spending a year composing intense music, day in and day out. They'd never been happy with the scrappy production on their first two albums and, in the years since their release, new trends had sprung up: dubstep and EDM. While Jacob describes them as "corny and tasteless", he recognised the sheer weight of their sound.

"You'd hear a dubstep drop or some EDM song, and you'd be like, 'This is so loud. This is so powerful. There's so much low end. Heavy music was still trapped in the mid range of not using those really revolutionary production techniques that kids were just figuring out on their laptops on [digital audio workstation] Ableton. And so that became our cross to bear; we wanna make a heavy record that can tastefully combine sonic elements from electronic music. Which, when you think about it, is exactly what industrial music does."

The result was 2015's "neo-industrial" record, *Death Magic*. From there, it wasn't too much of a leap to 2019's *Vol 4: Slaves Of Fear*. Jacob and John made an 'audio mood board' that drew on some of their

PRESS/ADAM ALESSI

favourite Slayer, Metallica and Pantera records, as well as sub-bass and electronic elements, resulting in a "fucking heavy-ass record". *Pitchfork* hated it. "Health used to make lithe, multifaceted songs that wrapped daring pop melodies in bristling noise; now, they seem content to complain into a murky hybrid of trip-hop and metal," said the reviewer, awarding it a score of 3.4 out of 10.

Jacob smiles wryly. "*Pitchfork* were incredibly giving to our band, but we never really fit. We're not an indie band, we don't have jangly guitars, we were always the odd man out. And so we were making *Vol 4*, and we were like, '*Pitchfork*'s gonna hate this fucking record.'

"From doing the *Max Payne* stuff, and seeing people at our shows, we were like: 'These aren't *Pitchfork* kids. They're kids who are connected to our music because it's dark and heavy, and it means something to them. Subconsciously, I think we wanted to make a record for them. And we had this sense that there are fans of heavy music that have never heard about our band, that we think would like us."

In the UK, Health went from supporting indie bands such as Interpol to headlining a stage on the Bring Me The Horizon day of London's All Points East festival. Each of their studio albums is usually accompanied by a remix album, but for *Vol 4*, they decided to do a collaborations album instead. A *heavy* collaborations album: *Disco4: Part 1*, featuring original, amped-up songs made with the boundary-pushing likes of Perturbator, Full Of Hell and Ghostemane.

"This is going to sound grandiose, but there aren't many collaboration records, so it became something where we wanted to set a benchmark," explains Jacob. "I wanted us to make this weirdly compelling document of musicians collaborating, that still plays like an album."

Now they're making *Part 2*, which will turn it into a double album, starting with that Health x Nine Inch Nails track. It's the second time they've worked together; Trent co-produced the band's 2010 song, *USA Boys*, at his home studio. He's always been like a mentor, says Jacob, admitting: "Sometimes I feel we let him down by not getting bigger." Nevertheless, Health are 16 years into their career and still pushing themselves outside their comfort zone, something their Grammy, Oscar and Emmy award-winning mentor must surely approve of.

Earlier, Jacob mentioned 'kids' connecting to Health's music because it's dark and heavy, but does he feel the same way as an adult? Is it cathartic for him?

"Absolutely," he shoots back. "And maybe I wouldn't have been able to answer that question so definitively if not for the wall-to-wall dogshit that was 2020. I don't want to be too hokey by saying music saved my life, but I realised how quintessentially important it was for me on a therapeutic level. Understanding why music makes the hairs stand up on the back of your arm, or why you get a knot in your throat, or why you want to throw a chair across the fucking room."

Or, why those Monday-night crowds in 2005 wanted to swing across a circle-pit and raise hell. Health may have got their start with the indie crowd, but it's time to claim them as our own.

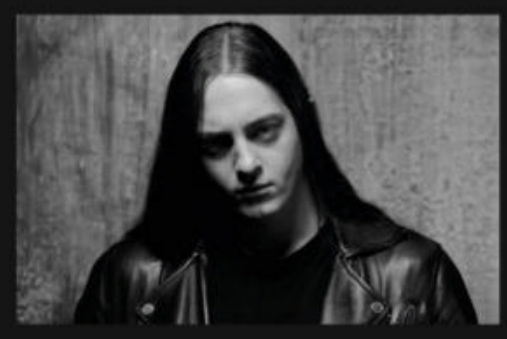
***DISCO4: PART 1* IS OUT NOW. THEIR SONG WITH CHINO MORENO APPEARS ON THE *DARK NIGHTS: DEATH METAL SOUNDTRACK*. BOTH ARE OUT VIA LOMA VISTA**

PRESS

I ♡ HEALTH

We asked some fellow genre-pushers what they love about the band

ASHANTI MUTINTA, BACKXWASH
"I found about Health through the internet. I'm really into harsher music and frequencies and it was just up my alley. The different styles, and attention to composition in the *Disco* [remix] series is just mindblowing. I remember listening to *Crusher* – the drumwork and use of distortion is incredible – and saying to myself that this is insane. I've been a fan since I found them and I'm now an even bigger fan."



JAMES KENT, PERTURBATOR
"Health are everything I like in music. Their sound is heavy, aggressive, sometimes leaning towards soundtracks and always dark. It always seemed obvious to me that this is a band I want to work with on many different projects."

DYLAN WALKER, FULL OF HELL
"Working with Health was a big moment in my life. Full Of Hell have a serious penchant for eating candy and we go real heavy on the carbs, so once we started to focus on Health, it all turned around. They showed us how to focus on core strength and aerobic exercise while still maintaining a somewhat relaxed lifestyle, in and out of the studio. Now we are Full Of Health."

Amazing Grace

When Edmond Karban fell out with Negură Bunget bandmate Negru, he couldn't have imagined the two would never get the chance to make up. Now, with Dordeduh, Edmond is seeking peace with his past

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURES: ALEXANDRU MOGA

"I should not be making music anymore," says Dordeduh frontman Edmond 'Hupogrammos' Karban. "I've had my time. I've played the greatest festivals in Europe, I was in Romania's first black metal band, and the first metal band from the country to sign to an international label. I could easily lay down my guitar and say I did my thing. And yet this is an album that I still felt I had to make."

Edmond is speaking from his new home in the verdant hills of Banat, two hours south of his birthplace, Timişoara, in the Romanian, much-fabled region of Transylvania. He's reflecting on both the career-wrecking effects of the pandemic – he was a studio and live engineer until COVID-19 broke out – and a devout, revelatory and often turbulent 27-year musical journey that put his home country on the metal map while forever altering the black metal landscape in its wake.

As songwriter and co-founder of black metal visionaries Negură Bunget, his exploration of native folklore and spirituality took him from the most underground of beginnings to helming a revered, ever-evolving entity that reached its zenith with their fourth full-length, 2006's *Om*. Utilising traditional instrumentation such as the tulnic alphorn, the nai pan flute and the toacă – a hammered wooden block hung from a frame, once used as a call to prayer – it was an album of fierce and otherworldly wonder that resonated on the most rarefied yet primordial of levels. It's regularly cited as one of the greatest black metal albums ever made.

Negură Bunget weren't able to bask in its glory for long. Long-running tensions between Edmond and his fellow band founder, drummer Gabriel 'Negru' Mafa, led to an acrimonious parting of ways three years later. He wouldn't know it then, but Edmund would never get to speak to Negru again.

When Dordeduh emerged from the ashes in 2010 with the *Valea Omului* EP, and the debut album, *Dar De Duh*, two years later, it was clear that this was a different beast. It was obviously the work of the same artist – the traditional instruments, Edmond's signature, tantric-shudder tremolo riffs, the intrepid, veil-of-reality-piercing sense of purpose all remained – but the tremulous atmospheres had been dialled down for something more progressive. Where *Om* sounded like it was inhabiting a transitional, in-between realm, Dordeduh's shape-shifting was accompanied by a greater sense of presence – less a dive into the mysterious, more an experience of the kaleidoscopic nature of *being*. Then, silence.

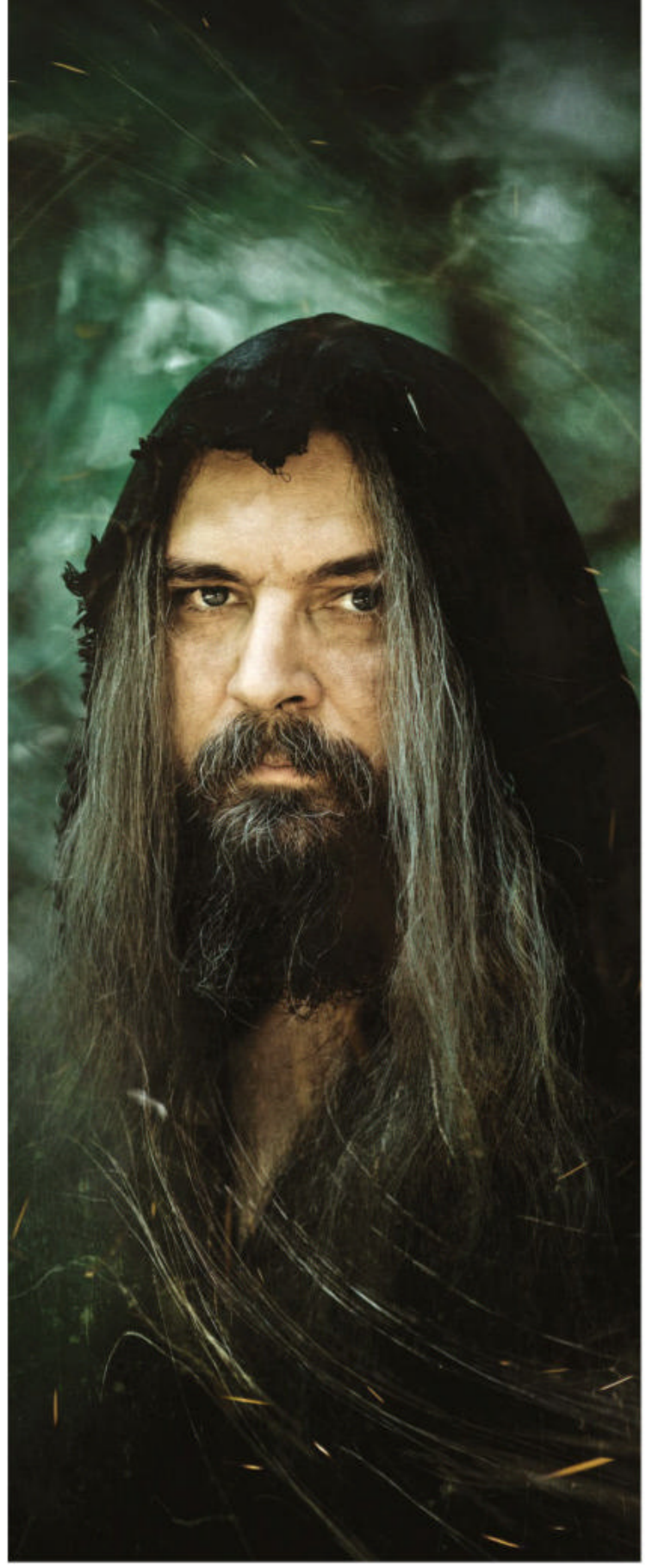
"We nearly completed an album five years ago," says Edmond, "but it would have been just a natural progression from *Dar De Duh*. So we said, 'OK, let's just forget this material.' I didn't want to repeat myself. Even with Negură Bunget you won't find two albums that sound the same."

Eight years after *Dar De Duh*, a worthy successor has finally appeared. *Har* ('Grace', in all its nondenominational meanings) is a vast broadening of horizons, steeped in the romantic essence of Edmond's homeland but revealing a host of new pastures to explore. It's one of those rare albums whose total conviction, masterfully commandeered adventurism and pristine yet out-of-time soundscape marks out a singular yet universally resonant spiritual path.

If there is one other artist who offers a parallel with Edmond's journey, however, from Negură's debut album, *Zîrnindu-să* ('Into The Nightshade') to the sheer artistry and unbound possibilities of *Har*, it's Emperor vocalist and solo artist Ihsahn. "I still believe that *In The Nightside Eclipse* is the best black metal record ever made, and I still have high regard for Ihsahn," he says. "You realise pretty quickly that this is a guy who knows what he's talking about, and this is important. I really believe in the integrity of black metal. You need to be impeccable with your own approach, to be able to stare into the abyss and straight in front of darkness."

For Edmond, that willingness not only to face your own demons, but to commit yourself fully to engaging with those uncanny realms at the edges of our senses, began long before he found the perfect form to express it. "For me, spirituality is something that began earlier in life, but it's not a virtue in the way that people who go, 'Oh, I'm so spiritual' would describe it," he relates.

"Particularly in my adolescence, having that connection wasn't



Dordeduh (left to right): Andrei Jumugă, Flavius Misarăș, Sol Faur, Edmond 'Hupogrammos' Karban

something desirable, it was something I wanted to put aside and not think about. It's not necessarily a positive experience, because if you are authentic in how you deal with it, it can be a really big burden. When you're oversensitive, and you feel shitloads of things for shitloads of people, that starts to affect you, no matter how strong you think you are. It's not something I often talk about, but I've had my fair share of these kinds of experiences, and although I'm lucky I understood this early on in my life, I developed anxieties and depressions, and I can't say that I'm over them even now."

It's testament to Edmond's ability to gain perspective on his experiences that *Har* manages to journey between darkness and light, through passages of elemental, blackened surges and transcendent, psychedelic splendour with the deftest, most holistic of touches. No more is this balance apparent than in the video for the track *Desferecat*, where Edmond and his musical partner, Sol Faur, who left Negură Bunget alongside him, engage in a series of rites, from incense-infused meditation through acts of suspension portraying the Hanged Man tarot to ceremonious, mace- and spear-wielding destruction of straw figures.

"I really wanted to incorporate a ritualistic aspect on this album," says Edmond, "and with that video, I wanted people to understand the violence that is happening within yourself when you are going on a really deep, serious journey. It's not like this mumbo jumbo positive thinking. When you really want to dive into this shit, you will really fucking meet your own darkness. When you shatter your demons, it may embody a lot of positive elements, but it will definitely embody all the negative ones too, because you are embracing your fear. Fear is where you are vulnerable, and you need to clear it out, but the path is never easy."

In September 2014, Edmond's estranged bandmate, Gabriel, passed away from a heart attack. He was only 42. With so much history having passed between the both of them,

"HE DIED ON MY FUCKING BIRTHDAY"

EDMOND 'HUPOGRAMMOS' KARBAN

and with so much left unsaid, it left Edmond with a new Rubicon to face up to and cross.

"I will tell you something. He died on my fucking birthday. So when people told me what had happened, I thought it was a fucking joke. So, of course, there were a lot of personal feelings that were bound up in his death, but there was a lot of grief in the whole story. There were lots of things that were left unsaid, but there were things that were unsaid when we were still performing together, for many, many years, and I accept my own responsibility for that.

"I always thought, 30 years would pass and we'd be able to sit down and just clear out all the shit," Edmond continues, "because nobody is winning if you carry all this tension throughout your whole life. And I'm sorry I didn't have the opportunity to clear everything up with him. But I actually went to his burial, with Sol, and I actually met his mother, who I had a really good relationship with as a kid, and for me and Sol, we went to pay our respects, and we both felt that something was lifted."

The cover for *Har*, created by in-demand artist Costin Chioreanu, is an appropriately elegant expression of the hard-won sense of liberation that permeates the album. It depicts a figure traversing the elements of earth and fire, air and water, undergoing an all-encompassing moment of epiphany. As much as Dordeduh deliberately shy away from referencing their homeland's history, they touch on something fundamental within it. As Edmond explains, the name Transylvania is literally founded on transcendence – 'the land beyond the forest', and the perilous journey one must undertake to seek freedom on the other side.

"It isn't even just folklore," says Edmond. "There are many parts around here that are kind of spooky when you experience them. But the point is, everyone must find their own path. But if you are truly in tune with what you are doing, then I believe it will connect, beyond cultural borders. If I can touch one single person, for me that purpose is fulfilled."

***HAR* IS OUT NOW VIA PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS**

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER

IRON MAIDEN

Senjutsu

PARLOPHONE

Metal's most travelled champions reach new states of grandeur

TOURING THE GLOBE is a physically abusive, mind-numbing grind. Most bands build much-needed breaks into their itineraries so they can decompress at home or recharge in the balmy vibes of a tropical holiday. Then there's Iron Maiden, who capitalised on a break in 2019's Legacy Of The Beast tour, not only to *not* chill out, but to record an entire goddamn album – their utterly majestic 17th studio full-length, *Senjutsu*.

2021 finds Maiden as doggedly ambitious as they were when they stormed onto the scene in the mid-70s. *Senjutsu* is an electrifying, cinematic masterpiece, its imagery built around Japan's pre-modern Samurai era and clocking in at 82 minutes - their second double album. The title track opens *Senjutsu* with sharp, scything riffs that build into a grandiose, minor-key epic as Bruce Dickinson effortlessly crushes one soaring high note after another.

At a time when singles rule the land, Maiden remain firmly entrenched in the same album-oriented aesthetic that dominated the landscape of their early years. As such, *Senjutsu* is best experienced as a whole. And while Maiden continuously seek to evolve their sound, there are certain non-negotiable elements. Steve Harris's metronomic, two-fingered gallop remains tautly synchronised with drummer Nicko McBrain's swinging, single-bass tempos, alongside the breath-taking harmonic interplay between guitarists Adrian Smith, Dave Murray and Janick Gers. From front-to-back, *Senjutsu* serves up generous helpings of each.

Adrian's enduring appreciation of Stevie Ray Vaughn comes to mind when hearing the punchy swagger of single *The Writing On The Wall*, with its blistering opening riff and soulful, sky-dusting solos. *Stratego* roars out of the gate with a blustery gallop, harmonised chorus and exotic melodies. Elsewhere, *Days Of Future Past* – the shortest track at just over four minutes – uncorks an unrelenting siege of metallic riffs and the kind of wild, fist-pumping tempos that turn South American football stadiums into giant circle-pits. *Lost In A Lost World* opens with a dusty acoustic thrum and Bruce's raw,

JOHN MCMURTRIE

Iron Maiden: the metal masters

plaintive vocals. In lesser hands this approach could descend into mawkish sentimentality, but Bruce sings with the deeply affecting introspection of a man pinned between his ragged past and a bleak future.

On any other album, *The Time Machine* might stand out for its hyper-dramatic chorus and chugging, syncopated breakdown, but it lacks the memorable hooks and identity of other tracks. *Senjutsu* closes with three Harris-penned tracks totalling more than 33 minutes. Over the top? Absolutely. And yet, as only Maiden do, they pull it off by giving each track a compelling story and packing each with so many hooks, tempo changes and different parts that it never feels excessive. *Death Of The Celts* is the standout – a tragic, soul-stirring saga with a fluttery, *Clansman*-esque acoustic intro and a middle section that features a ripping guitar duel redolent of Thin Lizzy's *Roisin Dubh*. *The Parchment* showcases a creeping, Middle Eastern-tinged melody and a pomp-laden symphonic backdrop that feels like we're driving straight into the *Powerslave* pyramid. Closer *Hell On Earth* begins with a soft, luminous intro, but by now we know that by the end of the track we'll be on our feet, pounding our chest and proclaiming the glory of Maiden – which is precisely what happens.

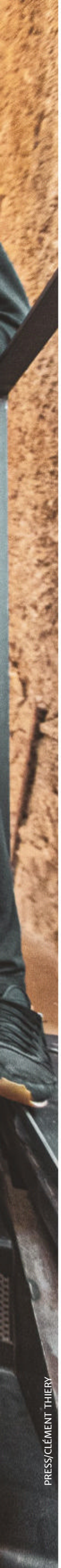
Senjutsu, while emerging as Iron Maiden's most refined and compositionally mature outing yet, lacks nothing in terms of sonic force. If it's metal haymakers ye seek, look no further. Perhaps it's the guys' advancing age or the strange times in which we all find ourselves, but *Senjutsu* is also the band's most emotionally compelling work, not just of the post-reunion era, but of all time. One listen isn't enough; with successive spins, *Senjutsu* continues to reveal its astonishing depth and a wealth of melodic treasures that will see it easily claim its place alongside the finest works of their canon. An unqualified masterpiece.

"*SENJUTSU* IS IRON MAIDEN'S MOST EMOTIONALLY COMPELLING WORK"

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Dio, Thin Lizzy

JOE DALY

Jinjer: *Wallflowers* could cost you a trip to the dentist



JINJER

Wallflowers

NAPALM

Ukraine's progressive metal hotshots hit the bullseye

IT'S A TRIUMPH in itself that Jinjer are still around, let alone on the upward trajectory that sees fourth album *Wallflowers* as one of the most highly anticipated metal records of the year. Their home nation of Ukraine sits alongside Moldova as the poorest in Europe, rife with corruption, poverty and an ongoing conflict with Russia known as the Donbas War. Nevertheless, Jinjer have channelled this adversity into concentrated rage and fused it with their brand of groove-laden prog metal to produce a sound with enough punch to knock out several teeth and fracture a jawbone for good measure.

Add the events of the last 18 months into this potent mix and *Wallflowers* has all the ingredients necessary to be the angriest record of 2021. It makes its case immediately as *Call Me A Symbol* flies out of the traps with a flurry of drums and guitars whilst vocalist Tatiana Shmayluk screams *'Look at me!'*. Any album starting in such a bludgeoning manner is guaranteed to be given your full attention. However, as the track seamlessly becomes more melodic and Tatiana showcases her clean singing, Jinjer reveal where they really flourish. They effortlessly mix savagery and serenity in a way that never feels jarring or out of control – an ability that has made them such a valued presence in alternative music.

The momentum generated from the opening song continues across the next 10 tracks with no let-up. *Colossus* lives up to its name with a huge stomp and thunderous blastbeats before lead single *Vortex* twists and turns through moments of calm and chaos and *Pearls And Swine* brings more of a progressive chug to affairs. Jinjer also occasionally move into more uncharted territory but deliver superbly regardless. *Disclosure!* boasts a layered, grunge-like vocal performance and the title track starts with a teasing bassline from Eugene Abdukhanov before moving into something more akin to ambient post-rock; it doesn't last, of course, but it's thrilling to see Jinjer pushing the boundaries of what they can do with such panache. Closing track *Mediator* stakes its claim for the best mosh call of the year – a sharp opening cry of *'Stop!'* from Tatiana, a brief silence and then a shout of *'Go!'* unleashing a final hell on the senses.

Wallflowers is, from the first note to the last, Jinjer's finest work to date. Although they can no longer be considered a cult band – previous album *Macro*'s critical acclaim moved them away from that particular tag – this record will send them into the metal stratosphere with consummate ease. There haven't been many releases in 2021 with the combined technicality and brutality that this offers across its 50 minutes, and there probably won't be many more to come in the next few months, either. If you consider yourself a metalhead, this is essential listening.

FOR FANS OF: Arch Enemy, Whitechapel, Employed To Serve

ELLIOT LEAVER

"*WALLFLOWERS* WILL SEND JINJER INTO THE STRATOSPHERE WITH CONSUMMATE EASE"

ALCHEMY OF FLESH

Ageless Abominations

REDEFINING DARKNESS

One-man angelic morbidity from Athens, Georgia

It's self-evident that Alchemy Of Flesh mastermind Tim Rowland owns Morbid Angel's first four albums. While death metal continues to dazzle with its strength and diversity, the imperious sound of early-to-mid-90s technical brutality remains an unassailable benchmark. *Ageless Abominations* is much more than an exercise in nostalgia; a huge, room-filling production job with chest-caving kick drums makes sure of that. But AOF are saluting and refining something ageless and revered here, favouring a brutish but slimy mid-pace over all-out blasting, and an atmosphere of hellish dread that seeps from every crusted, obsidian pore. The weirdly catchy *House Of Earth* and the scowling sludge of *Sleeping Chaos* are every bit as good as the classics that inspired them.

FOR FANS OF: Krisiun, Hate Eternal, Morbid Angel

DOM LAWSON

AURI

Those We Don't Speak Of

NUCLEAR BLAST

Nightwish mastermind re-enters the chill-out zone

"Auri's are the keys to a dimension of awe no one else sees," gushes the spiel for the second LP from Tuomas Holopainen's chill-out project, backing up his wife Johanna Kurkela alongside Nightwish buddy Troy Donockley on uilleann pipes, bodhran, bouzouki, tin whistle and other instruments familiar from the *Titanic* soundtrack. It neatly infers the tweeness and the niggles that many may find growing throughout these stretches of benign background waft: the cloying affectation, the childlike overstatement, the self-satisfied assertion of emotional profundity. At best, *Those We Don't Speak Of* sounds like Amber Asylum collaborating with B*Witched on an album of 'Celtic Moods' for a shop that sells joss sticks.

FOR FANS OF: Within Temptation, Clannad, Disney-Pixar's *Brave* OST

CHRIS CHANTLER

BEYOND GRACE

Our Kingdom Undone

PROSTHETIC

UK death metallers sharpen their carving knife with a conscience

Nottingham's Beyond Grace approach death metal with methodical efficiency. They offer up choice cuts of viscerally satisfying brutality, largely sticking to a straight-ahead assault, yet throwing occasional curveballs, such as the mid-section of *Barmecide Feast* that recalls *Choronzon*-era Akercocke. Calculated aggression and cunning underpin every beatdown and runaway riff in *Our Kingdom Undone*, while each song highlights real-world instances of oppression. Though largely masked behind direct death metal bluster, songs like the ominous *Persona Non Grata* and *The Price Of Peace* show there is much more roiling beneath the surface.

FOR FANS OF: Bolt Thrower, Incantation, Abysmal Dawn

RICH HOBSON

METALLICA & VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Metallica Blacklist

BLACKENED RECORDINGS

Ghost, The Hu and... Miley Cyrus go all in on a Metallica lovefest

Metallica get covered in glory

ALONG WITH THEIR Super Deluxe 30th-anniversary reissue of *The Black Album*, Metallica have released a compilation of 53 different *Black Album* covers by an eclectic legion of artists from myriad realms of the music universe. With all proceeds going to charity, Metallica encouraged performers to select whichever song they wanted to cover, regardless of whether it had already been selected. Consequently, with only 12 songs in play, most tracks appear multiple times. For example, there are seven versions of *The Unforgiven*. And be forewarned: consecutively listening to all 12 versions of *Nothing Else Matters* will leave even the most resolute listener teetering on the precipice of sanity.

Music's most compelling covers see artists recasting familiar songs in a unique and thrilling new light. *...Blacklist* boasts several such tracks, like Biffy Clyro's *Holier Than Thou* – an onslaught of surging beats, razor-wire riffing and a supernova-sized breakdown. Speaking of *Holier Than Thou*, Off! turn in a positively blistering version that anyone unfamiliar with the original could credibly mistake for an old-school punk anthem.

Ghost transform *Enter Sandman* into a euphoric slice of 70s hard rock with snarling riffs, piano-driven melodies and Papa's witchy, layered vocals. And Mongolian marauders The Hu check in with a slamming *Through The Never*, sung in their native tongue and played with the wild, surging ferocity of a bloodthirsty horde riding into battle. Other notable performances include St. Vincent's smouldering, pseudo-industrial take on *Sad But True* and Ha*Ash's version of *The Unforgiven* – a dreamy slice of acoustic balladry that feels like the theme to a mythic quest.

The Hu answer the call

Statistically, some misses are to be expected. Colombia's Grammy-collecting megastar, Juanes, funks up *Enter Sandman* with a bit of Latin flavour, but you'd still be hard-pressed to remember it among the numerous other versions. Elsewhere, Chase & Status bring in Background Gee for *Wherever I May Roam*, showcasing some filthy hip hop grooves but leaving listeners waiting for a huge payoff that never arrives.

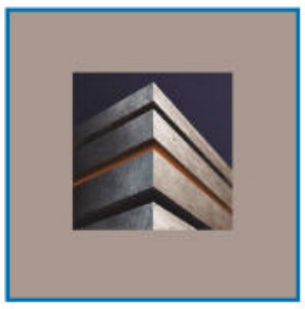
But the hits outweigh the misses by a mile, especially when you've got hitters like Royal Blood, Weezer and Corey Taylor in the line-up. And while Miley Cyrus's collaboration with Elton John and others on *Nothing Else Matters* is one of the more memorable tracks, country legend Chris Stapleton taps into the gritty defiance of the original with a mean and dusty eight-minute version that rises to the top of the *...Blacklist* heap. Closely related, Jason Isbell and The 400 Unit turn *Sad But True* into a boozy roadhouse shakedown.

Charitable aims notwithstanding, the question inevitably arises: just how many versions of *Enter Sandman* does one person need? More pointedly, what's the purpose of such heroic excess? First, *...Blacklist* aligns perfectly with Metallica's enduring ethos of doing everything bigger and better than anything done before. But ultimately, this is a towering show of force that underscores how, unlike any other band in history, Metallica have transcended heavy metal and emerged as one of music's greatest cultural exports. And while nobody's going to love all the versions on *The Metallica Blacklist*, there's a track for every person, mood and playlist. It's one hell of a fun ride.

FOR FANS OF: Metallica, Foo Fighters, Avenged Sevenfold

JOE DALY

PRESS/HERRING & HERRING



BLANKET
Modern Escapism
MUSIC FOR NATIONS

Blackpool's eclectic post-rockers cover themselves in glory

Blanket's second album is a textured journey brimming with self-assured ambition. Bringing together post-rock, shoegaze and rich sonic landscapes, the Blackpool-based quartet look to perfect the sonic blueprint behind their 2018 debut, *How To Let It Go*. On *Modern Escapism* the band are, by their own reckoning, expanding their horizons as they entice listeners down the rabbit hole. Opener *White Noise* unfurls amongst a plethora of warped riffs and rhythmic twitches as waves of hypnotising cleans crash unapologetically into visceral bursts, whilst *The Mighty Deep* and *Violence* flirt with shimmering electronica as melodic ambience sits alongside potent heaviness. Grandiose in its vision but never faltering from start to finish, Blanket's musical curveballs reward with every listen.

FOR FANS OF: Mogwai, Deftones, Cave In

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

BLOODPHEMY
Blood Sacrifice
EMPANZIPATION

Dutch death metal brutalists address old white collar crimes

Based around the story of an over-zealous clergyman who massacred his own family in 1800s rural America, the fourth album from Dutch septet Bloodphemy explores themes of devotion and madness via their no-frills, chug-chug-chug style of old-school death metal. The first thing that hits you is the guitars of Bart van Wallenberg and Arjan van Dune, whose textured heft provides the album's most satisfying element – although the abyssal larynx of vocalist Olivier van der Kruijf also deserves a mention. *Bloodborne* is the finest track here, lodging itself into the brain courtesy of its corkscrewing intro riff, Maiden-esque soloing and overall sense of drama. *Blood Sacrifice* does the job fairly efficiently – but a few more idiosyncratic touches might have helped to convey the album's promising concept more effectively.

FOR FANS OF: Asphyx, Benediction, Sinister

JOSEPH STANNARD

BONEHUNTER
Dark Blood Reincarnation System
HELLS HEADBANGERS

Finland's scatological metal punks start eyeing up the Andrex

While album titles like *Sexual Panic Human Machine* and *Children Of The Atom* may have these Finns conjuring images of day-glo-coloured dystopias, Bonehunter have historically preferred saluting blackened metal punk's inert world. Their 2011 demo was entitled *Sonic Diarrhea Holocaust* and four albums later the power-trio-from-the-worst-toilet-in-Oulu remain mostly emboldened by that manifesto. Fans seeking sequels to *Enter The Satan's Dimension* and *Sex Messiah Android* may be taken aback by *Dark Blood Reincarnation System*'s snippets of maturity, though. Rhythms akin to early, skittish Megadeth populate *Devil Power Soldier*; major keys are utilised in *Virgin Devil Princess*; melodic leads soar like a classic rock-Japanese hardcore collision; and *Altered Beast*'s walking bass imagines what might have happened had Jason Newsted never left Flotsam And Jetsam – which sounds as crazy coming from stereo speakers as it does on paper.

FOR FANS OF: Midnight, Abigail, Bathory

CONNIE GORDON

THE BRONX
The Bronx VI
COOKING VINYL

LA's punk'n'roll institution hold up their end of the bargain

The Bronx have never let anyone down. Ever. No matter what is going on in the world, no matter where or when you hear them, the LA punks are guaranteed to put a spring in your step with their infectiously boisterous hardcore'n'roll hybrid. So, guess what? The sixth full-length Bronx album is basically the same as all the others: a rapid, rabid, cocksure joy. It doesn't matter if it's the bass-heavy throb and swagger of *Curb Feelers*, the careering, full-speed ahead bellow of *New Lows* or the slightly new-flavoured, krautrock, robo-rock of *Mexican Summer*; The Bronx never surprise and never disappoint. Some might question if you really need a sixth album of this kind of thing, but when the quality is of this standard, you can't deny that *Bronx VI* justifies its existence. Great again.

FOR FANS OF: Black Flag, The Stooges, Gallows

STEPHEN HILL

Aborted: symphonies of slickness

ABORTED
Maniacult
CENTURY MEDIA

Belgian death masters swap bloodshed for bombast

WHILE NONE OF their releases feature among death metal's greatest moments, Aborted can certainly lay claim to be one of the genre's most prolific and consistent bands. In fact, barely a year passes without a solid full-length or an EP from the Belgians, which is remarkable given their revolving door of members and the progression over the last 25 years.

Coming just a year after the lavish leanings of the *La Grande Mascarade* EP, it should come as no surprise that album 11 is another worthy of the Aborted seal of quality. From the opening title track that's drenched in maniacal atmosphere, a hailstorm of notes and pummelling grooves, this is a band displaying a slick ownership of their craft, with every dynamic delivered with ruthless precision. But rather than a cold exercise in exactitude, *Maniacult* takes the aforementioned EP's lust for grandiosity and ups the ante. From the sinister *Portal To Vacuity* and *Dementophobia*, creeping along in a fiendishly macabre manner, to the final wall of sound that is *I Prediletti: The Folly Of The Gods*, it's an album that revels in disparate moods.

Founding member Sven de Caluwé continues to develop his cavalcade of voices and the supremely talented rhythm section keeps the classic horrorshow of *Drag Me To Hell* from careering off the tracks, but *Maniacult*'s ace in the hole is now-sole six-stringer Ian Jekelis. Not only are the technical riffs as dazzling as required, it's when the frantic runs cease that he can let rip with some masterful lead work that stands tall among *Impetus Odi* and *Ceremonial Ineptitude*. Though it might be a touch too polished for those looking for something exclusively grubby and grisly, Aborted's approach of taking the sweetest meats from death metal's gruesome platter ensures *Maniacult* has something for everyone to sink their teeth into.

FOR FANS OF: Cattle Decapitation, Misery Index, Mental Cruelty

ADAM REES

PRESS

Between The Buried And Me prove well red

BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME

Colors II

SUMERIAN

North Carolina's progressive extremists rekindle a radiant classic

***COLORS* IS HEAVY** metal's Rubik's Cube: a vibrant puzzle so mind-bending that it's addictive. It was formulated by a band who loved jazz and the avant-garde as much as they did Cannibal Corpse. After five years of feeling too experimental for headbangers and too rowdy for prog, Between The Buried And Me declared, "Fuck it!," composing the most indulgent maximalism they could. The result was ambitious to the point that no one has emulated it since, cramming innumerable harmonies, death metal blasts and ebullient melodies into 64 minutes. Not even its creators have recreated such magic – although this sequel comes tantalisingly close.

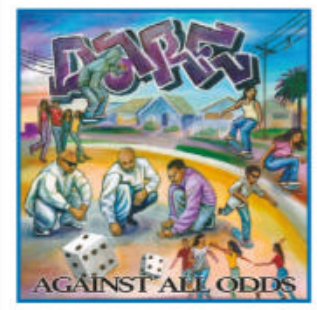
Colors II is a mirror of the original, exploring the same spectrum in sequence. *Monochrome* commences with vaudevillian piano pop à la its opening predecessor, *Foam Born...*, then *The Double Helix Of Extinction* screeches to life in a tech-death fury. *Prehistory* is just as head-scratching as Sun *Of Nothing*, incorporating banjos while samples span from Saturday-morning cartoons to Yello's *Oh Yeah*. Finally, *Human Is Hell (Another One With Love)* stands in for *White Walls*: a quarter-hour of erraticism concluding with flurrying guitar leads.

The skeleton may stay unchanged but, like before, it's the marriage of confusion and charm that makes *Colors II* so replayable. By the time you've asked, "How does *Fix The Error* smoothly switch from bass-led jazz to a Mike Portnoy-style drum solo?," *Never Seen/Future Shock* has already ensnared you. The centrepiece sees virtuosity dissipate into a rare, accessible refrain, rocketed to triumph by Tommy Rogers' soaring voice.

In being so loyal to the structure of what's come before, *Colors II* doesn't reinvent progressive metal like its predecessor, but by all other metrics, it lives up to its lineage. It's the only album to ever recapture *Colors*' brand of restlessness, reaffirming that BTBAM are once-in-a-lifetime masterminds.

FOR FANS OF: Cynic, Obscura, The Dear Hunter

MATT MILLS



DARE

Against All Odds

REVELATION

OC's authentic-sounding straight-edge crew get their skates on

Dare are a skateboard-loving, straight-edge hardcore band from Orange County, and Terror's Scott Vogel contributes guest vocals on *Hard To Cope*. The support is justified; Dare have a confident sound rooted in the old school but fresh and fierce enough to make waves today. Their songwriting, production, and vocal power have been noticeably honed, too. Raw, full-pelt yells and rumbling basslines rip through *Never Yours* and *Dare2be* amidst some spiralling fretwork, while the fast-paced frenzy, and more intense, menacing moments of *Better Off*, *Neglect* and *V.O.T.* ache to be unleashed live. A distinctive, honest, and infectious effort by a band who deserve to be heard.

FOR FANS OF: Terror, Mindforce, Madball

NIK YOUNG

DEAD ROMANTIC

Voices

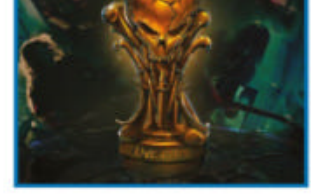
MERCIA

Hook-heavy Brit alt-rockers expand their horizons

If you worshipped *Sempiternal*-era Bring Me The Horizon, rising UK outfit Dead Romantic will fill the void left behind. Their debut full-length is packed to the rafters with huge singalong choruses and immersive atmospherics framed by screaming guitar solos. It's no mean feat reaching that lofty echelon of fusing gripping rock with boisterous metallic infusions while making each track sound like an independent single. The proof lies in the powerful *Kissed With A Lie*, *Yesterday*'s soaring melody and the point where the album's vigorous energy meets a grand crescendo on *All Talk*. There's a bright future ahead for these purveyors of addictive anthems, so watch this space.

FOR FANS OF: Bring Me The Horizon, The Used, Architects

ALI COOPER



DESTRUCTION

Live Attack

NAPALM

Teutonic thrash legends unleash a stream of classics

Celebrating four furious decades of Destruction, this aptly named, career-spanning album/DVD collection is a welcome rampage down memory lane. Recorded at the famous Z7 in Switzerland in the middle of another lockdown, their 22-song strong set was originally broadcast as a livestream on New Year's Day and it's now received a much-deserved physical release. A must-have for fans of the German thrash legends, the show features a feast of classic cuts that haven't been performed in years (*Invincible Force*, *Life Without Sense*) alongside much-loved set staples like the evergreen, Maiden-spiced *Mad Butcher*. While the absence of a rabid crowd does hamper some of Destruction's momentum in places, it's still a savage affair regardless.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Accuser, Tankard

EDWIN McFEE

PRESS/GEORGE ANDREWS

EX DEO
The Thirteen Years Of Nero
NAPALM

Rome-obsessed metallers turn their attention back to tyranny

What this side-project of Canuck death metal kings Kataklysm might lack in incisive extremity, it makes for in its scale and theatrical pomp. After 2017's *The Immortal Wars* looked at Hannibal and the Punic Wars, this fourth full-length explores the Roman Empire under the maniacal Nero, with tales of conflict and despotism told in opulent style. Crucial is the involvement of Carach Angren's Clemens Wijers, whose orchestral elements really add to the narrative rather than being in the background as on previous releases. The strings seep into nefarious opener *The Fall Of Claudius*, while giving *Britannia: The 9th At Camulodonum* and *Boudicca (Queen Of The Iceni)* the necessary epic scope. The ferocity of *The Head Of The Snake* also ensures frontman Maurizio Iacono's orating remains imperious rather than straying too far into cheesy am-dram.

FOR FANS OF: Carach Angren, Septicflesh, Fleshgod Apocalypse

ADAM REES

FAWN LIMBS
Darwin Falls
ROMAN NUMERAL/WOLVES AND VIBRANCY

Lynchian math-grind nightmares for the masses

Grind is basic rations. Steam in, shake it about, split. But Fawn Limbs are ripping up the rulebook on their third album, punctuating frenetic bouts of spasmodic bludgeon with offbeat orchestration and unsettling storytelling. Drummer Lee Fisher's fiction-mangling narratives are full of the perplexing, hallucinatory imagery you might expect if Harry Crews or Donald Ray Pollock spun a sequel to Pig Destroyer's *House Of Snakes* track. The prevailing sense of apprehension is only heightened by the accompanying noir sax and eerie strings, while the occasional Americana-indebted twang of electric guitar echoes Earth's stately dustbowl majesty. Confronted by such tension-building, it's a near-blessed relief when the band revert to full-on assault mode, with guitarist Eeli Helin's bloodcurdling shrieks cheerleading a merciless drag back to Hell.

FOR FANS OF: Cephalic Carnage, Pig Destroyer, Cult Leader

SPENCER GRADY

FILTH IS ETERNAL
Love Is A Lie, Filth Is Eternal
CHURCH ROAD

Seattle punks Fucked And Bound regenerate and exhilarate

Formerly known as Fucked And Bound, this Seattle quartet have really come into their own on their second LP. Whilst their hardcore roots are still apparent in the furious energy and rampant d-beats, there's a slightly sludgier feel to a lot of the riffs this time. Vocalist Lisa Mungo shows off even more range, delivering convincingly savage screams and a snottier, more melodic snarl. Tracks like minute-long opener *On The Rake* deliver all the brash, punky energy you'd expect, but slower songs like the swaggering *Private Room* and *Deeper Void* suggest early Kylesa fronted by Brody Dalle. *Wigsplitter* finds a middle ground between the two, a mid-paced yet rambunctious hardcore assault recalling later Black Flag. There's no flab at all here, making this a dynamic and thoroughly energising experience.

FOR FANS OF: Black Flag, Trap Them, Oathbreaker

KEZ WHELAN

FLUISTERAARS
Gegrepen Door De Geest Der Zielsontluiking
EISENWALD

Dutch black metallers go back to brilliant basics

Following the acclaim of Fluisteraars' 2020 third album, *Bloem*, the Dutch duo returned to the studio seemingly straight away to record a follow-up. *Gegrepen...* is still dreamlike, reedy black metal, but more minimalist in approach. All instruments were recorded in one take, retaining the natural acoustics of the room. There are only three tracks across 36 minutes. *Het Overvleugelen Der Meute* is a gnashing introduction wrought with longing sensation; *Brand Woedt In Mijn Graf* explodes in high-end anxiety, journeying through driven, amorphous experimentalism. The opening eight minutes of 20-minute closer *Verscheuring In De Schemering* – all undulating riffs and melodies veering and shimmering over persistent d-beats – are so good you could listen to the section alone on repeat, forever. Fluisteraars are a consistently compelling must-listen.

FOR FANS OF: Deafheaven, The Botanist, Laster

TOM O'BOYLE

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

DEATH INGLORIA
Death Ingloria II: Death By Admin
SELF-RELEASED

Magnifying life experiences through a sci-fi-tinted lens, this EP delivers an intense mélange of distorted riffs, haunting melodies and lyrical poignancy, not least on progressive epic *Nuke The Site From Orbit*.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

LORNA SHORE
...And I Return To Nothingness
CENTURY MEDIA

A short, sharp, three-song EP from these New Jersey extreme metallers hits the spot incredibly well with its icy, symphonic overtones and blistering guitars. A stunning follow-up to last year's *Immortal* record.

ELLIOT LEAVER

LURCHER
Coma EP
TREPANATION RECORDINGS

Bluesy licks, chonky riffs and great vocals purposely buried in the mix? Why, it's stoner rock! This Welsh three-piece's debut EP worships Red Fang's slower meanderings, chucking in some ambience for good measure. Ones to watch.

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

SODOM
Bombenhagel
STEAMHAMMER/SPV

Diehard road-hogs with itchy feet, Sodom sound more ferocious than ever here. One revamped classic and two new cuts confirm that the Germans are still the ultimate thrash warlords. The road won't know what hit it.

DOM LAWSON

SPIRIT ADRIFT
Forge Your Future
CENTURY MEDIA

Bit of a modern classic EP this. The US rivet-heads affirm their journey from bedsitter doom project to world-class HM exemplars, sharpening their chops on three smooth, sturdy anthems, elegantly blending brain and brawn.

CHRIS CHANTLER

SUNCRAFT
Flat Earth Rider
ALL GOOD CLEAN

Exploring modern concepts via atavistic rock'n'roll, this Nordic quartet keep you on your toes. Like QOTSA colliding with The Hellacopters, it's heavy, bouncy and more than slightly messed up – not a bad combination at all.

ALEX DELLER

Deafheaven focus on the 'gaze' part of the blackgaze equation

DEAFHEAVEN

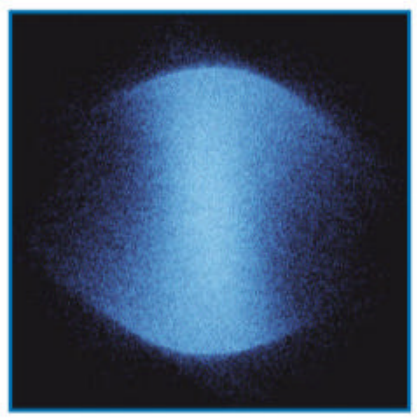
Infinite Granite

SARGENT HOUSE

San Francisco's blackgaze champions attempt a leap into the big leagues

AFTER INFUSING THEIR metallic fury with melancholic shoegaze and post-rock for the better part of their career, the question wasn't *if* Deafheaven would go all in on their softer moments but *when*, and most importantly: how good the outcome would be. The answer is, well, a bit disappointing.

The band quickly became the biggest fish in the blackgaze pond, and it's understandable that they'd grow restless. But now, they're swimming with giants. From legends like Slowdive and My Bloody Valentine to a whole army of young revival bands like DIIV, Greet Death and Beach House, a lot has already been said in the realms of shoegaze. In light of this competition, *Infinite Granite* struggles to hold up. Remember the rush of blood to the head you felt when *Dreamhouse* kicked in? That won't happen here. And it's not because George Clarke switched from his trademark shrieks to clean vocals and whispers – a bold, if not necessarily always a good move. It's because somewhere along the way, Deafheaven have lost some of the intensity that had previously made them irresistible.



The wall of sound built out of catchy riffs, piercing vocals and ferocious drumming has made way for a more subtle, synth-laden sound; the push and pull between harshness and beauty has been transformed into a softly flowing stream of dreaminess. There's a burden in setting an almost impossible standard with nearly perfect albums like *Sunbather*: it makes every merely good album after that – and *Infinite Granite is* a good album in terms of songwriting and production – seem like a letdown.

The record does have its highlights, though, with *Great Mass Of Color*, constantly ebbing and flowing between silky-smooth verses and sweeping singalong choruses, being one of its moments of glory. There is beauty to be found in the details of *Infinite Granite*. But is that enough?

FOR FANS OF: **Alcest, Nothing, Slowdive**

CHRISTINA WENIG

GLOOP

Crayon Sun

GRIMOIRE

Surprisingly approachable art rock from the wastes of West Virginia

West Virginia is a backwater nightmare: bottom of the state list in public health, education and social services, but champions of overdose rates, early mortality and environmental pollution. It's both shocking and understandable that a band as progressively leftfield as Gloop hails from the same dump where coal is still a thing. The band's third album is an uncontrolled amalgam of everything the trio have ever heard mashed into a deliberate, angular heap that winds parrying punctuations and free-jazz atonality around noisy krautrock and arty no-wave punk. How they make this violent lashing out coherent and hummable is an unbelievable feat.

FOR FANS OF: **Cows, Devo, Melt-Banana**

CONNIE GORDON

GOLDEN ASHES

A Lightless Christ Shuns The Crown Of Divinity

IMPROVED SEQUENCE

Noise maestro's black metal mission sparks into epic life

Those familiar with Mories' noise project, Gnaw Their Tongues, will identify his ireful stamp corrupting Golden Ashes' third album. But, for all its bristling rage, it's more linear than GTT, the latter's terrifyingly murky convulsions ceding to an undeviating panorama of grandiose synths and cascading black metal pummel. Tracks such as *The Spectral Catatonia Of Unbearable Despondency* and *The Day Of His Glorious Wrath* surge in symphonic waves of hypnosis-inducing anti-rhapsody. Cursory listens might conjure the ecstatic realms of Mare Cognitum, but prolonged exposure reveals a more misanthropic mien, with Mories taking on the role of a deific ringmaster nonchalantly lobbing his theological cargo into the nullifying void.

FOR FANS OF: **Darkspace, Battle Dagorath, Starless Domain**

SPENCER GRADY

HEATHEN RITES

Heritage

SVART

Swedish doom veteran finds a new future in the ancient past

Back when Witchcraft were the next big thing in proto-doom circles, fellow Swedes Burning Saviours were their closest stylistic kin, even though they failed to achieve anything on their own. Two decades later, frontman Mikael Monks has returned with a solo project inspired by "Nordic folklore and ancient landscapes". Yet *Heritage* is a multi-faceted beast. While much of this debut showcases seriously heavy-stomping metallic doom, you also have more delicate songs, like the magnificent *Midnight Sun*, permeated with pure Scandinavian gloom. It's here, where he offers a more delicate and poignant side, that *Heathen Rites* really comes to life.

FOR FANS OF: **Candlemass, Swallow The Sun, Hexvessel**

OLIVIER BADIN

PRESS/ROBIN LAANANEN

HOODED MENACE
The Tritonus Bell
RELAPSE

Finnish doom/death deviants start to lighten the load

Indicative of how important metal's most spandex-littered era has become to Hooded Menace's slow'n' low doom/death, the bonus track of the Finns' sixth album is a cover of W.A.S.P.'s *The Torture Never Stops*. However, strapping on Blackie Lawless's codpiece, in addition to Messiah Marcolin's monk's robe, is just the beginning. In *Blood Ornaments* and *Corpus Asunder*, *The Tritonus Bell* hosts the most uptempo moments of Hooded Menace history while the melody driving *Chime Diabolicus* comes straight from the lunch pails of a 70s working men's club. Morose and crawling stained-glass doom still dominate, but it's encouraging that the subgenre's insularity has been opened up with spirited melodies, a metronomic boost and a bit of guitar-hero shredding. The album cover rules, too.

FOR FANS OF: Celtic Frost, Cathedral, Paradise Lost

CONNIE GORDON

DANKO JONES
Power Trio
MATE IN GERMANY/TONPOOL

Canada's fast-talking rock'n'roller keeps the riffs cranking

After 10 studio albums and tours with artists from all genres and sizes, there's no doubt that the eponymous Danko Jones should be far better known. A fast-talking, charismatic guitarist, frontman and songwriter, Danko himself has spent 25 years belting out ferociously fuzz-tastic yet hook-friendly rock'n' roll. From its low-slung opener *I Want Out* to the cowbell-enhanced rhythm-fest of *Good Lookin'* and *Raise Some Hell*'s potshot at Nickelback to the *Start The Show*, which features ex-Motörhead guitarist Phil Campbell, *Power Trio* is a laser-guided exercise in devastating simplicity. If only Danko Jones had a gimmick of some kind, they'd be massive. Then again, let's be grateful that one of rock's most consistent club entertainers remains within easily viewable distance.

FOR FANS OF: Monster Truck, Royal Republic, Motörhead

DAVE LING

KAL-EL
Dark Majesty
MAJESTIC MOUNTAIN

Stoner rockers encounter Captain Kirk on their interstellar travels

Presumably named after everyone's favourite Kryptonian (sorry, Supergirl!), Norwegian quartet Kal-El have been steadily earning an impressive reputation thanks to their Sabbath-flavoured brand of riffola wrapped around vocals that soar as high as the Man Of Steel. This fifth full-length sees them take another step up the ranks to stoner rock royalty, and while the Tony Iommi-endorsed act don't tinker with their formula too much, they do deliver some truly mammoth slabs of speaker-shaking goodness. "Forged by interstellar witchcraft", (according to frontman The Captain), the opus is inspired by political conspiracy theories, primal blues and sexy aliens. Standouts include the title track, which boasts a lead riff reminiscent of Cathedral's classic *Hopkins (Witchfinder General)* and the gloriously groovy *Spiral*, which sees their singer really let fly with those Ozzy and Perry Farrell-esque pipes.

FOR FANS OF: Black Sabbath, Slomosa, Cathedral

EDWIN MCFEE

KILLING
Face The Madness
MIGHTY

Danish thrash maniacs step back from the threshold of absurdity

Are these Danes trying to be the Steel Panther of thrash, or a rejuvenation of its heyday à la Power Trip? Listening to their debut full-length, it's difficult to decide. On the one hand, they relish in such excess that they border on parody, frequently barrelling through stylistic conventions with the ludicrousness of Exodus on an amphetamine bender. Riffs bombard and drums blastbeat nonstop, while frontman Rasmus Soelberg screeches maniacally. Plus, there's a priest ready to carve a baby with an axe on the cover; how much sillier can thrash get? And yet, *Straight Out Of Kattegat*'s *South Of Heaven*-esque gloom begs to be taken seriously, and *Killed In Action* wants to transcend expectations as a seven-minute groove monster. Killing clearly understand their genre; they just need to figure out if they want to dictate its future or satirise its clichés.

FOR FANS OF: Exodus, Kreator, Slayer

MATT MILLS

Leprous find a glorious silver lining

LEPROUS
Aphelion
INSIDE OUT

More introspective splendour from Norway's prog mavens

INCREASINGLY ONE OF the most original and creative bands in heavy music, Leprous hit a particularly gripping peak of efficacy on 2019's *Pitfalls*. Inspired by frontman Einar Solberg's battles with depression and anxiety, it exerted such profound emotional weight that it was almost too delicate and raw to consume in one sitting. Having weathered the storm and made peace with his mental health struggles, Einar now brings us the next chapter in his band's endless rollercoaster ride.

Where *Pitfalls* was necessarily myopic in its focus, *Aphelion*'s sense of liberation has led the Norwegians to make one of the most varied and emotionally potent records of their careers. From the spiralling fiddles that augment *Running Low*'s dark pop sprawl to the grand, noir-ish labyrinth of *Nighttime Disguise*, the band's seventh studio effort is all square pegs and alien colours, not to mention thrillingly over-burdened with brilliant musical ideas.

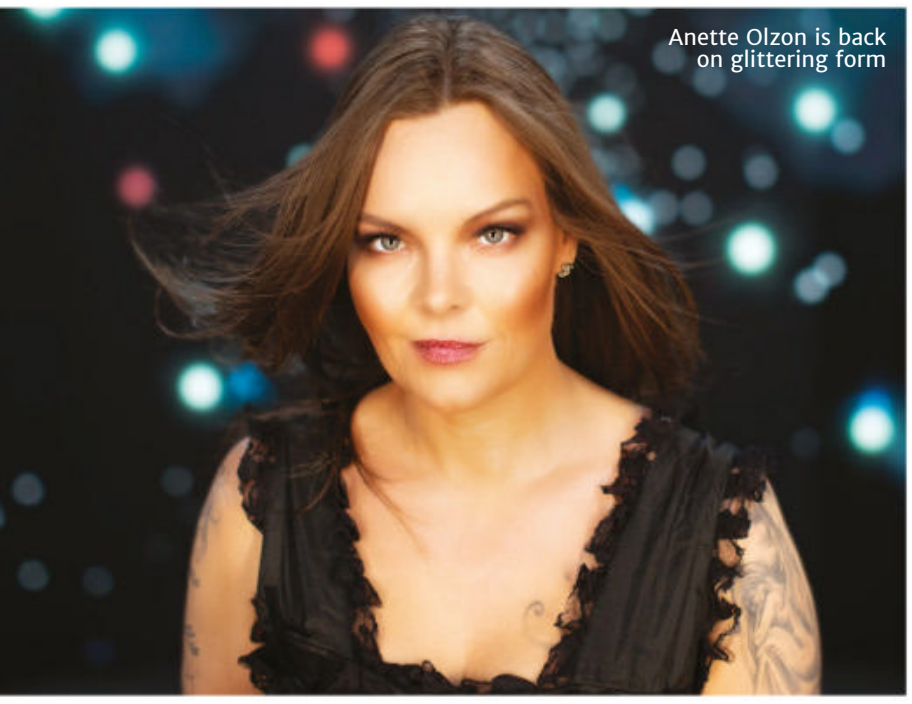
Leprous's pop sensibilities have never been more apparent nor refined than on the succinct likes of *Out Of Here*, *Silhouette* and *The Shadow Side*, but each of them summons its own textural world: a perpetually shape-shifting blend of analogue warmth and digital minutiae. As ever, it's Einar Solberg's extraordinary vocal range and sky-shattering melodies that complete the picture. From *Running Low*'s righteous octave-clamber to *The Silent Revelation*'s wildly dynamic blend of stuttering prog-funk and *Have You Ever?*'s angular dream-pop, the frontman inhabits these songs with rare conviction and just a hint of knowing theatricality.

And yes, it's frequently beautiful, too. The finest song here by a yard or two, *All The Moments*, sounds quite unlike any previous Leprous music, as they slip down a sublime art rock rabbit-hole of their own curious design, before a majestic, strings-drenched chorus erupts from nowhere. Even the hardest of hearts will crumble. Again.

FOR FANS OF: Pain Of Salvation, Voyager, Ihsahn

DOM LAWSON

PRESS/TROLL TOFTENES


Anette Olzon is back on glittering form

ANETTE OLZON
Strong
FRONTIERS MUSIC

Former Nightwish frontwoman harks back to her heavier side

WHEN ANETTE OLZON first embarked on a solo career, it was a tough sell. Following her acrimonious split from symphonic metal titans Nightwish in 2012, the Swedish singer turned away from metal, releasing her solo debut, *Shine* – an album of folky pop rock that stripped back the bombast, helmed by Celine Dion's producer. It was the music in her heart, but it failed to ignite the interest of metal fans.

Over the last four years, Anette's work as one half of The Dark Element, her melodramatic collaboration with ex-Sonata Arctica guitarist Jani Liimatainen, seems to have rejuvenated her passion for heavy music. Just like TDE, her second solo album, *Strong*, comes off like a metal incarnation of Abba, with inescapable melodies juxtaposed against galloping guitars and synths. Opener *Bye Bye Bye* could be a Nightwish track, tinged with symphonic histrionics and eyebrow-raising lyrics that could easily be about her ill-fated time with the Finnish metallers: *'Could I ever know what would come? / The day I got the call from you / Could anyone have told me before / That the end would be so cruel / I got screwed...'*

While The Dark Element's material sometimes lacked bite, the melodies on *Strong* are consistently arresting and impactful. *Sick Of You*'s Eurovision-esque sensibilities are swept away on producer and guitarist Magnus Karlsson's squealing solo lines, and some monstrous vocals from the man himself add some deliciously weighty balance amid the pop sparkle. Similarly, the title track and *Parasite* take their nods from Dimmu Borgir's icy keys and the earworm melodicism of In Flames. By the time *Roll The Dice* brings the album to a dramatic close, showing off Anette's sweet yet impressive vocal range to the full, it's clear the singer has turned in her best work since Nightwish's *Imaginaerum*.

FOR FANS OF: Nightwish, The Dark Element, Amaranthe

DANNII LEIVERS

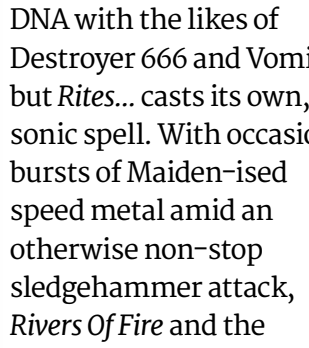
KROSSFYRE
Rites Of Extermination
HELLS HEADBANGERS

Spanish hellbombs rain down on the blackthrash blueprint

Krossfyre's turbocharged take on arcane metal could hardly be more convincing. Steeped in the ugly splendour of the post-Venom underground, these Spaniards share plenty of DNA with the likes of Destroyer 666 and Vomitor, but *Rites...* casts its own, sonic spell. With occasional bursts of Maiden-ised speed metal amid an otherwise non-stop sledgehammer attack, *Rivers Of Fire* and the wickedly thuggish *Deadly Bites* are zealously sworn to the black. At their most adventurous, Krossfyre weave brittle, Darkthrone-like dissonance through the maze of blastbeats and caveman riffing. The weirdly frostbitten *Casus Belli* is swollen with infernal menace and drenched in abyssal reverb, while *Spit-Bullet* is a grim, bombastic grand finale that fades to a squirming, lysergic black.

FOR FANS OF: Destroyer 666, Absu, Mongrel's Cross

DOM LAWSON



LOW FLYING HAWKS
Fuyu
MAGNETIC EYE

Melvins-backed stoner rockers fail to hit the heights

For all their lofty trappings, Low Flying Hawks seem intent on plucking low-hanging fruit. The band's third full-length sees them deploying strings and operatic vocals while otherwise staying true to a bleary sound that suggests too much weed and too much Mogwai on the stereo. The band cover a fair bit of ground, with sludge, stoner rock and shoegaze all swilling around in the mix. Despite this variety, and despite Melvins' Dale Crover and Trevor Dunn playing drums and bass respectively, it's too tepid to truly soar: a derivative, mid-tier release that's neither as stupid nor as smart as it needs to be to attain transcendence.

FOR FANS OF: Lowrider, Shrinebuilder, Dead Meadow

ALEX DELLER

NECRONAUTICAL
Slain In The Spirit
CANDLELIGHT

Mancunian black metal quartet balance fury and elegance

With their 2019's *Apotheosis*, Necronautical appeared to trade in the apoplectic relentlessness of their first two albums in favour of more melodic, yet no less commanding, guitarwork. This follow-up bridges the fire of their early years with the grander production and songwriting of *Apotheosis*. The result is a proud basilica to black metal's most imperious tendencies, the symphonic elements skewing more towards the grandiose fury of Emperor or even Anaal Nathrakh than to the overly ornate stylings of Dimmu Borgir. Underpinning such extremity with swelling strings serves to highlight the brutal efficiency of Necronautical's craft – often going like a power saw through butter.

FOR FANS OF: Naglfar, Winterfylleth, Åskog

RICH HOBSON

WORLD SERVICE
Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

CRYPT MONARCH
The Necronaut
ELECTRIC VALLEY

These Costa Ricans' debut already has a firm grasp of psych/doom fundamentals, with great wobbly fuzz riffs and Sleep's *Jerusalem*-style chants maintaining interest over three songs in 35 minutes.

CHRIS CHANTLER

MIDHAVEN
Of The Lotus & The Thunderbolt
UNIVERSAL MUSIC INDIA

This Mumbai trio's sophomore album will batter senses and snap necks. It's a hefty slab of prog metal, chock-full of mournful, sludgy riffs and raw, anguished vocals.

ELLIOT LEAVER

VRYKOLAKAS
And Vrykolakas Brings Chaos And Destruction
DARK BLASPHEMIES

These Singaporean death metal maniacs mark their 30th anniversary by still worshipping at the dark altar of Deicide as the power trio deliver a fistful of potent pit anthems.

EDWIN MCFEE

PATRIK ULLAEUS/PRESS

THE NIGHT FLIGHT ORCHESTRA
Aeromantic II
NUCLEAR BLAST

Soilwork frontman slips back in to his disco shoes

The Night Flight Orchestra were formed 15 years ago by members of Soilwork and Arch Enemy, among others, united by a guilty secret: their love of classic hard rock from the 1970s and 80s and, er… tacky disco workouts. Think Stallone's Rocky sporting aviator shades. When COVID-19 torpedoed a tour for album five, *Aeromantic*, the Swedes hunkered down to write a new record, only to realise it was a spiritual continuation. Newcomers won't have heard Björn 'Speed' Strid emoting cleanly over banks of pulsating keys, as he does on the anthemic *Violent Indigo*, the air-punching *Midnight Marvelous* and *Chardonnay Nights*' cheese-feast. The lactose-tolerant will stumble upon a thrilling surprise, though clearly this isn't for everyone.

FOR FANS OF: Survivor, H.E.A.T, Toto

DAVE LING

ONE WITH THE RIVERBED
Absence
SNOW WAVE

Michigan post-black metallers head out into the wilderness

This Michigan quintet combine atmospheric post-metal with grandiose black metal. *Absence* is their first album after 2018's *Solace* EP, revealing a sound that's more focused, offering less atmospheric meandering and more driven intensity. *Thaw* journeys from field recordings through keening cinematic landscapes and into pummelling passages of black metal. The leads go all proggy at the close, before the ravenous pace returns with *Carcass*. It bleeds out into breathy environs, with contrasting male and female vocals. *Disembodied* is borne on the wings of a great riff, skittering through the wilderness before the melodic repose of *Sanctuary* and spirited closer *Phantom's Glance*. *Absence* is best enjoyed as a whole. It's a dynamic journey through wild expanses that proves the destination is often less important than the journey itself.

FOR FANS OF: Panopticon, Cult Of Luna, Wolves In The Throne Room

TOM O'BOYLE

OSI AND THE JUPITER
Stave
EISENWALD

Norse folk-infused Americana from the Appalachian heights

Since 2015, this Ohio outfit have built deep psychic inroads to the ancient past through an immersive fusion of Norse folk and the music of Appalachia. 2019's *Nordlige Rúnaskog* skewed heavily toward the former style, but their latest sees the band – largely the one-man project of Sean Kratz – turn their gaze homeward, drawing inspiration from the rugged and remote mountains of Appalachia and the folk traditions they inspired. Centred around the spare pluck of strings and some rudimentary percussion, *Old Ways* and *Folk Of The Woods* point toward mystical connections to the natural world with a wrenching sense of loneliness and isolation. *Mountain Shamanism* captivates with its smouldering bluegrass overtones, mournful vocals and velvety strains of cello. Subdued yet affecting, *Stave* offers convincing proof that heaviness has nothing to do with volume and everything to do with raw, unguarded emotion.

FOR FANS OF: Wardruna, Sólstafir, Panopticon

JOE DALY

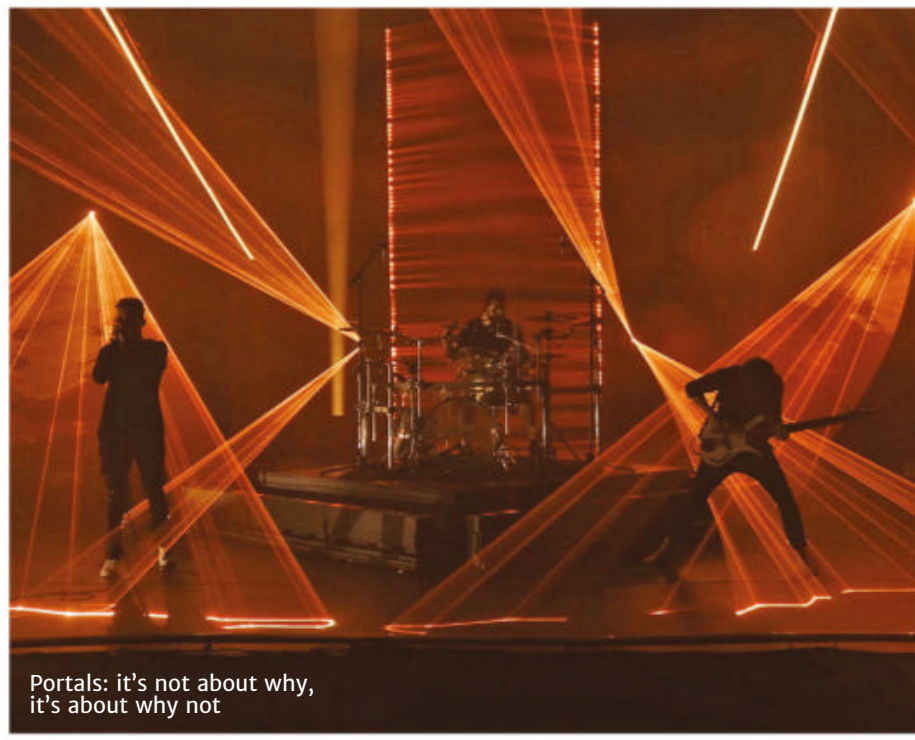
PIL & BUE
The World Is A Rabbit Hole
INDIE RECORDINGS

Nordic post-rockers revisit the follies of youth

Norwegian post-rockers Pil & Bue have gone nostalgic on their third album, with guitarist and singer Petter Carlsen drawing on his childhood for the lyrical themes. The fuzzy riffs on *Everyone's Just A Kid* and stoner vibes on *Select 2 Players* evoke a youthful innocence that makes this record an incredibly fun listen; however, it still takes the time to be serious. Between this and 2017's *Forget About The Past, Let's Worry About The Future*, the two-piece changed drummers and left Carlsen with the struggle of continuing the project on his own. With long-time friend Gøran Johansen now in the fold, the words *'Sometimes it takes a failure to change things for the better'* on the penultimate *The Resonator* ring loud and clear. *The World Is A Rabbit Hole* is an album that proves to be as thoughtful as it is catchy.

FOR FANS OF: The Mars Volta, Russian Circles, Wolfmother

ELLIOT LEAVER



Portals: it's not about why, it's about why not

TESSERACT
Portals
KSCOPE

UK tech-metal standard-bearers bring their spectacular livestream back to life

BACK IN DECEMBER last year, the UK's most prominent tech-metal band played one of the more visually striking livestreams of the pandemic. Titled Portals, it showcased exactly why their popularity had increased over the decade while many of their early djent peers had fallen by the wayside. It makes perfect sense to release the entire thing as Tesseract's first live album/DVD/Blu-ray experience. Whether you're experiencing it for the first time or reliving it once again, this is a hugely impressive document showing how far Tesseract have come as a band.

Firstly, *Portals* just looks amazing, with the visual counterpart matching up to the state-of-the-art, expansive sounds that Tesseract create. Stood inside a cube that looks like something from *Tron*, the band are washed with an ever-evolving lightshow that works perfectly in tandem with the mood of the music. It's what the band are playing that is the most impressive thing to witness here, though.

Four albums into their career, they have a massively impressive back catalogue, meaning there is barely an unnecessary note present throughout the entirety of *Portals*. And, as much as the likes of *Eden*, from debut album *One*, are still enjoyable, it's the strides they've made that you can hear on *Tourniquet* from *Polaris* or, even more so, *Juno* and *King* from 2018's *Sonder* album, that really impress. The confidence, grasp of melodic hooks and ever-improving song structures never scrimp on the impressive technical prowess they have as a band.

Credit also needs to go to frontman Daniel Tompkins, who has always had a stunning singing voice, but has added a crushing roar and a far more confident command of the stage than he had when he first returned to the band in 2014.

FOR FANS OF: Tool, Periphery, A Perfect Circle

STEPHEN HILL

Turnstile have another successful musical brainstorming session

TURNSTILE
Glow On
ROADRUNNER

Eclectic, alt-hardcore expansionists hit the motherlode

BALTIMORE'S TURNSTILE HAVE already proved themselves adept at capturing the sound of 90s melodic hardcore and infusing it with a buoyant alt-rock haze – most notably on their 2018 album, *Time & Space*. The question of where Turnstile take that formula with this, their third full-length album, is answered within minutes of pressing play. Expansion is the key, with Turnstile bringing in more elements from the most unlikely of places. The offbeat percussive hits prevalent in the chorus of *Holiday* sound straight out of the Slipknot playbook. Three minutes earlier, on *Underwater Boi*, a tipsy tremolo guitar part sounds like the bed of a Chris Isaak song before the sun rises on a chorus ripped from the OST to *Miami Vice*.

Of course, Turnstile never actually sound like Slipknot or Chris Isaak, or the soundtrack to a sun-kissed 80s American crime drama. Their identity is too unique for them to sound like anyone else but Turnstile, but these disparate ideas are sewn through the fabric of *Glow On* and stitched together to create a beautifully layered and rich tapestry.

Blackout adds phaser synth sounds to its driving chorus to provide some nostalgic panache before a minor percussive interlude that conjures images of a punk rock take on Led Zep's *Moby Dick* makes way for the biggest breakdown riff you'll hear all year. All this in a song lasting just 2:53.

The wealth of ideas that Turnstile crowbar into their songs is ludicrous, and to do it all with such a sense of constant forward momentum is perhaps their most impressive feat. The rhumba beats that characterise *Don't Play* sound like vital parts of the composition rather than mere window dressing, and it's a trick that they pull off with consummate ease throughout. *Glow On* isn't just essential listening for fans of 90s melodic hardcore; it's essential for all fans of music.

FOR FANS OF: Ramones, PUP, Drug Church

REMFRY DEDMAN

QUICKSAND
Distant Populations
EPITAPH

NYC's post-hardcore firebrands focus their melodic powers

This influential post-hardcore band's fourth album is another delightful example of their unique talent. Like 2017's *Interiors*, it's produced by Will Yip and houses a carefully crafted combination of smart builds, melodies, dissonance and grooves. But the band seem comfortable being a touch less complex and more uptempo this time around, with Walter Schreifels's slightly raspy vocals proving particularly captivating. *Katakana* is big and bold, *Lightning Field* is drenched in effective Deftones influences, and *Brushed* is composed of relaxing acoustics and dreamy cleans. The frenzy and harshness of Quicksand's early days is occasionally missed, but the sweeping songwriting, thoughtful lyrics, and fresh sense of urgency is special in its own right.

FOR FANS OF: Hum, Snapcase, Rival Schools

NIK YOUNG

ROT AWAY
Nothing Is Good
LAST MILE

Danish hardcore debutants fail to rise to the occasion

This Danish hardcore crew's debut full-length is meat'n'potatoes metallic hardcore designed to do little more than make heads bang and bodies mosh. *Hang Low* and *Graves* in particular hint at slightly loftier ambitions, but at this stage Rot Away are far away from realising them. The press release hints at a big dynamic shift in sound between the band's EP and this album, but the progression between the two is microscopic and suggests that Rot Away aren't going to be making any major strides forward any time soon. Although there's nothing strictly wrong with *Nothing Is Good*, it just feels a little tepid and primitive compared to the best music coming out of the hardcore scene at present.

FOR FANS OF: Terror, Sick Of It All, Portrayal Of Guilt

REMFRY DEDMAN

SONS OF ALPHA CENTAURI
Push
EXILE ON MAINSTREAM

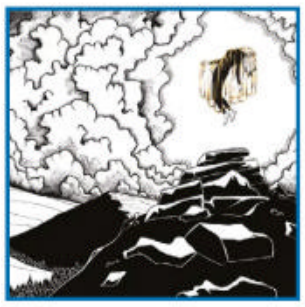
UK's post-hardcore pioneer reaches a new milestone

As the lead voice of Onelinedrawing, Gratitude, New End Original and, most notably, Far, Jonah Matranga has done more than most to shape the sound of what could be loosely termed post-hardcore and emo since the late 90s. The third album from the band Jonah fronts alongside Will Haven drummer Mitch Wheeler is more evidence as to why he has cultivated an obsessive fanbase. *Push* is a fantastic record, and may be the most reminiscent of his heavier, earlier work with Far. The chug and riffing on a song like *Boys And Girls* is perfectly complemented by Jonah's lilting, expressive tones. Great man, really great album.

FOR FANS OF: Far, Glassjaw, Quicksand

STEPHEN HILL

JIMMY FONTAINE/PRESS



SUGAR HORSE
The Live Long After
SMALL POND

Bristolian riff merchants expertly balance filth and ambience

Following 2020's *Drugs* EP, Sugar Horse continue to refine their sound on their debut full-length. It's an interesting one too, combining the crushing, portentous weight of contemporary post-metal with the angular, melodic prog of early 2000s acts like Oceansize. The three-minute *Fat Dracula* is the most concise example, contrasting atmospheric bass grooves and soaring, sombre clean vocals with pained shrieks and anxious distorted chords, given extra girth by Jake Healy's dense baritone guitar tone. Elsewhere, the songs get progressively spacier and more celestial as the album progresses. The luscious, reverb-swamped textures and melancholy basslines in *Phil Spector In Hell* recall *Disintegration*-era The Cure, while the title track builds steadily from twinkling strums to thunderous, churning doom riffs. *The Live Long After* will satisfy sludge, prog and shoegaze fans in equal measure.

FOR FANS OF: **Bossk, Oceansize, Cult Of Luna**

KEZ WHELAN

SUN OF THE SUNS
Tiit
SCARLET

Italian sci-fi-obsessed extremists barely achieve lift-off

Sun Of The Suns take a while to make their ambition manifest. The title track is the first true sign of promise for the newcomers, elevating tech and death metal tropes into something more befitting the cosmic sci-fi concept that lurks in the album's background. The sheer relentlessness and speed of each barrage of riffs creates a sense of near-inescapable intensity, but also often lacks nuance as instrumentals aren't given enough time to breathe and take root before the next assault begins. As such, the record's best moments often come when the band opt to take their foot off the pedal, as in the instrumental *To Decay To Revive*, or conversely flip into hyperactive overdrive, as on *Hacking The Sterile System*, expanding their tonal palette beyond 'brutal'.

FOR FANS OF: **Aversions Crown, Gojira, The Design Abstract**

RICH HOBSON

THYRFING
Vanagandr
DESPOTZ

Returning black metal Vikings set sail to conquer the mainstream

How are Thyrfing not international heavyweights by now? Between 1998 and 2013, the black'n'rollers released six earworm-strewn albums, all balancing shrill roars with harmonic guitars and hypnotising strings. They had the talent and regularity to transcend the underground – until they entered an eight-year-long slumber from which they are only now awakening. Fortunately, *Vanagandr* captures the Swedes at a creative apex. The rhythms range from blastbeats to AC/DC-level stomping, while choirs and Nordic chants all routinely inspire with their bombast. It's easy to imagine hundreds humming along to *Rötter's* choral conclusion, then moshing to the breakdown commencing *Träldomsord*. Plus, the pristine work of co-producer Jakob Herrmann – whose CV consists of collaborations with Evergrey and In Flames and – lends such moments their deserving pomp. Welcome back, lads. Now, can you please start filling venues?

FOR FANS OF: **Emperor, Satyricon, Enslaved**

MATT MILLS

TRNA
Istok
CANDLELIGHT

Russian blackgaze crew follow a familiar flightpath to the stars

Considering Trna describe their sound as "celestial blackgaze", you may expect grinding walls of blastbeats and distorted riffs set against hyper-dramatic post-rock synths. *Istok* delivers this in spades. *Echoes Of The Past* and *Rebirth* temper barrages of cold, dense riffage with airy, dream-like interludes, suggesting a cerebral depth beyond the rote, mood-setting quality of most atmospheric black metal. But apart from *Shining* – an exhilarating black metal banger with Gaerea – the balance of the material falls prey to the generic pitfalls of blackgaze; the more faithfully a band adheres to that sound, the harder it becomes to pick them out of the pack. If you're looking for a different take on a familiar sound, you won't find it here, but if it's a dreamy, blackgaze trip you seek, look no further.

FOR FANS OF: **Wolves In The Throne Room, Drudkh, Ellende**

JOE DALY

KAT DENNINGS/PRESS

Panic over: Andrew W.K.'s back in white

ANDREW W.K.
God Is Partying
NAPALM

Michigan's Party God switches his allegiance

NOTHING IN LIFE is certain, save for death, taxes and Andrew W.K. wearing a white t-shirt. *Wait. He's wearing a black t-shirt. Oh shit.* Recent photos of the self-proclaimed Party God flaunting an expanded wardrobe had fans worried. Then came *Babalon*, a hulking, Mercyful Fate-flecked track with Andrew waxing biblical about Greek deities, topping it off with a Halford-worthy falsetto wail. Not exactly 'party' vibes. If you checked out after 2001's *I Get Wet*, you'd be forgiven for not recognising him today. The euphoric, lairy shouting is pretty much gone, replaced with a mixture of croons and trad-metal vibrato. The obnoxious, major-key mixture of punk power chords and plinky, almost childlike keys has dried up, too. So what's actually *left*?

Something completely bizarre. Andrew's clearly been mainlining mid-2010s Devin Townsend into his inhumanly sculpted arms. It was hinted at on his previous outing, *You're Not Alone*, but the influence is stark here, right from *Everybody Sins*' simplistic chug playing against those angelic keys, to *No One To Know* and *I'm In Heaven*'s stirring percussion and choirs. You could've stuck that on Devin's *Transcendence* and gotten away with it, especially with the latter's spacey leads.

And that's just one slice of oddity at play. If you want weird, *And Then We Blew Apart*'s got you covered. Beatles piano ballad by way of a Sparks hook and Brian May solo? It's thrilling to hear such wild experimentation from a man basically known for one song and a nosebleed. Even stuff like *Remember Your Oath*, which would be naff in someone else's hands, shines by virtue of Andrew's sweaty magnetism and – not even joking – genuinely moving vocals. He's gotten scarily proficient.

It's heavy. It's uplifting. It's not *I Get Wet*. It's Andrew W.K., whatever that means in 2021.

FOR FANS OF: **Devin Townsend, Queen, Sparks**

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

The Wildhearts: masters of misdirection

THE WILDHEARTS

21st Century Love Songs

GRAPHITE

Romance, fury and optimism from the maverick geniuses of British rock

IT'S BEEN 11 years since The Wildhearts split up for the umpteenth and final time, and things are going better than ever for them. A band that always thrived on chaos, misadventure and doing exactly the opposite of what people expected were never going to stay dead, and 2019's risen-from-the-grave *Renaissance Men* was their best outing since their genius-level 1993 debut, *Earth Vs The Wildhearts*.

21st Century Love Songs continues this late-career hot streak. It's not quite as smack-in-the-face immediate as its predecessor was, but it's not far off. *Renaissance Men* was 39 minutes of anthemic carpet-bombing. This has more than its share of uppercut melodies and knockout choruses too – in the case of the luminous *Remember These Days*, it has several of both in just the one song. But they're just as willing to throw down a barrage of blastbeats like the ones that kick off *Institutional Submission* or step out of the pop explosion of *Sleepaway* for a quick burst of rockabilly. Look, it's the Wildhearts. It's what they do.

That album title is a red herring. Sure, the song *21st Century Love Songs* itself takes aim at traditional heteronormative ideas of romance (*"'A man needs a woman at the end of the day" / What a moronic crock of shit for anybody to say'*), but like all the greatest Wildhearts songs, at its heart it's really about rooting for the underdog. Elsewhere, frontman Ginger pours bile on the ruling classes on *Institutional Submission* and *Directions*, and tackles the close-to-home subject of mental health on the self-explanatory *My Head Wants Me Dead*.

Most startling of all is *Sort Your Fucking Shit Out*. *'David,'* sings Ginger, addressing his younger self, *'You've got another chance / So take off your shoes and dance.'* Fury and sarcasm we expect, but optimism? That's a new one for The Wildhearts. Long may they keep wrongfooting us.

FOR FANS OF: Metallica, The Beatles, Cardiacs

DAVE EVERLEY

UTOPIA

Stalker

APF

Seasoned debutants seek out a moment of calm within the chaos

Sometimes, music is just too fucked up to enjoy; you can appreciate Scott Walker's *The Drift*, but anyone cranking that during a BBQ is a maniac. John Bailey, who plays live guitar for Aled Jones (yes, that one), admirably straddles the fence on this debut. Corrupt Moral Altar's Chris Reese provides vocals, punting fetid, high-pitched screams into alcoves of tech metal, doom and whatever else scratches their jazz-infected itch; *Smiledyawnednodded* is a four-minute middle-finger to metre, whereas *Moscow Holiday*'s riffing exudes proper catharsis. But it's not all chaos; mid-album highlight *Utopia* opens with gorgeous, cleanly picked guitar. Sure, it swiftly plunges into bleak, Primitive Man-esque soundscapes, but the point is: there's peace within the panic. Somewhere.

FOR FANS OF: The Dillinger Escape Plan, Between The Buried And Me, Botch

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

VENUES

Solace

ARISING EMPIRE

Germany's post-hardcore hopefuls revive their fortunes

Persistence pays off. Despite losing a founding vocalist during their 2019 tour, Venues were revived by the dulcet tones of new voice Lela, who ushers in the emerging outfit's new era with her gorgeous cleans. Germany's answer to Marmozets have set aside their previous pop infusions in favour of a new post-hardcore soundscape, presenting a heady mix of sweet riffs and dual vocals while chucking in the odd hefty breakdown and skilful guitar solo purely for good measure. Packing the sass of *Rite Of Passage*, a nu metal snarl on *Shifting Colors* and the teeth-baring *Mountains*, Venues' heavier inclinations have nudged them in the right direction.

FOR FANS OF: Marmozets, Eyes Set To Kill, The Agonist

ALI COOPER

VISERION

Natural Selection

SELF RELEASED

NYC black metallers pine for the Nordic adventurers of yore

While many of their fellow New Yorkers have drawn influence from the ever-shifting city surrounding them, black metal trio Viserion have fixed their steely gaze on 90s Scandinavia. But for all the serrated riffing and thorny vocals, the band are hewing to a well-trodden trail through ice and snow. *Natural Selection* relies more on seething anger and desperate negativity than its own ideas, and this doesn't quite sustain them throughout. Still, the occasional illuminative bolt of lightning – Trevor Strnad's guest vocals on *The Wraith*, for example, or the slightly more variegated *Tortured Soul* – suggest a band who might yet be willing to claw their way out of their craggy comfort zone.

FOR FANS OF: Darkthrone, Anaal Nathrakh, Immortal

ALEX DELLER

WARKINGS
Revolution
NAPALM

German power metallers put gumption over gimmickry

Like a 1980s *Doctor Who* Dalek story, Warkings album titles are evidently mandated to begin with the syllable 'Re'; this is the only rationale for the naming of their third LP, as it contains no revolutionary impulses whatsoever, thankfully. This is still heads-down, fists-up, Teutonic trad power metal, conceptually and aesthetically steeped in ancient military history. Although the once-anonymous bandmates have been unexcitingly revealed as alumni from various veteran mid-tier German/Austrian PM outfits, Warkings' battle re-enactment cosplay visuals remain at full pelt. It's easy to be sceptical about cheesy gimmickry, but this is where Warkings confirm themselves on a higher musical level than style-over-substance megalol merchants like Powerwolf and Gloryhammer, proving a relatively versatile collection of aspirational singalong battle anthems.

FOR FANS OF: Sabaton, Manowar, Hammerfall

CHRIS CHANTLER

WHITE STONES
Dancing Into Oblivion
NUCLEAR BLAST

Opeth bass player finds a new progressive path to travel

White Stones is a curious case of a famous band's side-project managing to tread the thin line in between emancipation and tradition. Aside from Mikael Åkerfeldt himself, bass player Martin Méndez has been by far Opeth's longest-serving member, and it shows. Although White Stones are a five-piece, he's the focal point here and stirs the music towards the same progressively metallic shores he was once exploring with his main outfit. And yet *Dancing...* has its own vibe, with a strangely stripped-down and compact sound combined with angular, and occasionally jazzy riffs. Its ascetic nature may take some acclimatising to, but those who have been missing the *Ghost Reveries* and *Watershed* days might find something to their liking here.

FOR FANS OF: Opeth, In Mourning, Novembre

OLIVIER BADIN

WORMWITCH
Wolf Hex
PROSTHETIC

Canada's black metal punks lay out their creed of speed

Wormwitch's black metal falls on the 'rocking' end of the spectrum, retaining the anti-everything stance of their hardcore punk roots as they've evolved into the blackened death metal pack hunters they are today. This third album returns to the polished production of the Canadians' first two records after the enjoyably lo-fi assault of their 2020 oldies compilation, *Septentrion Revival*. First track proper, *Canadian Denim Mountain Attack*, is abuzz with virulent rhythm'n'pummel, with a hypnotic riff that speeds and slows, replete with grandiose soloing, gang shouts and moonward howls. *The Wolves Of Ossory*'s fists-in-the-air lead heralds full-blown fury. Closing with a cover of Metallica's *Hit The Lights*, *Wolf Hex* sustains a furious pace, managing to be simultaneously feral and lots of fun. One for future festival beer-soaked battery.

FOR FANS OF: Black Anvil, Spectral Wound, Uada

TOM O'BOYLE

XALPEN
Sawken Xo'on
BLACK LODGE

Pitch-black metal of death from Watain's wolfpack

The Selk'nam people of Patagonia were among the last in South America to have their lives ruined by migrating Europeans, and it's their language that Chilean horde Xalpen – fronted by Watain alumnus Alvaro Lillo – use to cast arcane spells. It makes sense because every moment of *Sawken Xo'on* comes shrouded in an eerie fog of ancient threats: black metal's warped spiritualism made manifest from deep within a storm of sabre-rattling, old-school clangour. Both opener *Devourer Of Light* and the heads-down blitzkrieg of *1340* point to an avowedly primitive ethos, but the more expansive, drawn-out onslaught of *Dark Nights Of Winter* feels like a kicking open of the creative floodgates. Thereafter, things get steadily darker, weirder and more unsettling, reaching a grotesque climax with the untamed grandeur and runaway-train blasting of *The Formidable Fumes Of Hell-Fire*.

FOR FANS OF: Marduk, Arckanum, Acherontas

DOM LAWSON

Wolves In The Throne Room: a stirring return

WOLVES IN THE THRONE ROOM
Primordial Arcana
RELAPSE

Olympia's atmospheric black metal masters reach new heights

WOLVES IN THE Throne Room's seventh album is in some ways their most DIY effort yet, recorded and mixed entirely at the band's Owl Lodge Studios. They've done a good job too, as *Primordial Arcana* boasts one of their most detailed, luscious productions. The booming drums are very upfront in the mix, the guitars sound huge and dynamic – check out the way those crystalline leads slice through opener *Mountain Magick*'s crisp, frosty soundscape – and you can even hear the bass too. The Summoning-esque *Spirit Of Lightning* is a feast for the ears, the band's trademark black metal embellished with all manner of atmospheric sounds.

It's also more of a full band effort. Aldebaran guitarist Kody Keyworth joined WITTR just in time for 2017's *Thrice Woven*, but he's been more intricately involved with the writing process here. *Primal Chasm (Gift Of Fire)* marries his funereal guitar harmonies with the band's blistering sound, resulting in one of their most layered and sonically inviting pieces to date.

Whilst the album is more self-contained than its predecessor, with fewer high-profile guest appearances, there are still some surprising but very effective outside contributions here. Infera Bruo's Galen Baudhuin lends some subtle melodic vocals and very prominent, driving bass to the gloomy *Through Eternal Fields*, and Vouna's Yianna Bekris contributes acoustic guitar to the epic 11-minute *Masters Of Rain And Storm*. The latter delivers both some of the most delicate and brutal material WITTR have ever ventured into, contrasting shimmering keys with almost death metal-style riffs.

Compared to the earthier, warm tones of *Thrice Woven*, there's an airier sound to this record. It's not quite as ethereal as *Celestial Lineage*, but there's definitely a colder, sharper feel to it. There's a keener focus here too, resulting in one of WITTR's most robust and well-realised records yet.

FOR FANS OF: Weakling, Panopticon, Summoning

KEZ WHELAN

PRESS/DREAMING GOD

LIVE REVIEWS

WITHIN TEMPTATION

UNKNOWN VENUE, NETHERLANDS

Epic Dutch metallers encounter some gremlins at the end of days

Within Temptation spin a thrilling, apocalyptic tale

FOLLOWING IN THE footsteps of Nightwish and Epica, Within Temptation's The Aftermath completes a trio of livestreams in the last month from symphonic metal's holy trinity. Whereas Epica's fantastic Omega Alive saw the band use copious amounts of fire and spectacular set pieces to elevate the music, like Nightwish's recent show at the virtual Islander's Arms, Within Temptation have leaned heavily on technology to take their extravagant sound to a visual conclusion.

The Aftermath fleshes out the dystopian concept the Dutch titans explored on 2019's *Resist*, creating four immersive, CGI worlds. During the pre-show, vocalist Sharon den Adel explains that she and her husband, Within Temptation guitarist Robert Westerholt, came up with the post-apocalyptic setting during recent discussions as the pandemic spread and deepened across Europe. And tonight, the show is punctuated by interludes from a humanoid head who sets out the storyline: after destroying our planet, mankind's only chance of survival is to escape Earth and build our future amongst the heavens. Immediately, we see that vision come to life with the band's first visual world. As the camera pans above the remains of a burned-out city, we pass twisted rubble and the burned-out skeletons of high-rise buildings before the band appear, each atop a crumbling skyscraper against a blood-red horizon.

Many of the band's best-loved tracks are omitted from the setlist; there's no *Angels, Stand My Ground, Mother Nature* or *Ice Queen*. Instead, tracks have been picked to complement the end-of-days narrative. Things kick off with *Forsaken*, the oldest track in WT's discography to be aired tonight, in its first live appearance in 13 years. As Sharon, dressed in billowing skirt, her face framed by an ornate headpiece, leads the band through its haunting chorus, her lyrical warning that *'There's no time anymore... We're the last of our kind...'* takes on a new meaning against the digital destruction and the looming backdrop of the pandemic. It's followed by the symphonic excess of *Our Solemn Hour*, where scenes of war, tyrants and environmental destruction are beamed from huge screens. That drama is maintained as ex-Nightwish singer Tarja Turunen – the first of many guests – pops up amid the wasted skyline for a powerhouse duet with Sharon on the anthemic *Paradise (What About Us?)*.

While most of The Aftermath's wide shots look fantastic, the stream does fall victim to the same issues that plagued Nightwish's event in the virtual Islander Arms. Within Temptation had to postpone this show by a week due to technical hiccups and, unfortunately, not everything has been ironed out. Many of the close-ups fall flat, with the band often looking glued into the scenery around them. The reliance on CGI means that there's no way to tell if any of the band's guests were even in the same room as them when the performance was recorded. And, despite a 19-month break from the stage, at times the band's performance is so polished that you can't shake the feeling you're watching an hour-long music video rather than a raw live show.

Saying that, though, the digital stage for the second act is stunning. Launching into 2020 single *The Purge*, the band find themselves in an underground cavern where they are flanked by towering plumes of fire and huge stone statues of forgotten gods, lost to time and buried by the world above. The sweeping camera shots of the scene are truly breathtaking and during a triumphant *Raise Your Banner*, and playful *Entertain You*, the camera takes us deeper into the vast space, resting for a moment on the severed heads of broken statues. It provides a sober reminder of the magnitude of the challenges facing our planet in real life and a reality check – no god will be able to save us if humans don't change their destructive ways.

Setlist-wise, things take a wobble with *And We Run*, the band's misguided duet with rapper Xzibit, while *Firelight* dampens the momentum in spite of some pretty visuals that have Sharon and Belgian singer Jasper Steverlinck floating amongst twinkling embers. Luckily, *Shed My Skin*, the band's soaring single featuring German metalcore mob Annisokay, sounds fantastic, even though the CGI at this point resembles an old *Final Fantasy* game.

Things improve for the fourth, and most ambitious, virtual world, though, as the band flee our dead planet, performing their final triumvirate of *The Reckoning, Supernova* and *Stairway To The Skies* in space. It's a stunning finish and, while the technology hasn't always kept pace throughout the evening, the final image of the band surrounded by glittering stars and planets while Earth burns in a hellish fireball below is testament to their vision. Conceptually, musically and visually, this is about as ambitious as you can get.

DANNII LEIVERS

THE SET

Forsaken
Our Solemn Hour
Paradise (What About Us?)
The Purge
Entertain You
Raise Your Banner
And We Run
Shed My Skin
Firelight
The Reckoning
Supernova
Stairway To The Skies

Sharon den Adel offers wonders to behold

The feeling is virtual...

The Aftermath's narrator: shit is clearly going to go *down*

Joey Belladonna: still nailing the high notes

ANTHRAX

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

NYC's thrash giants celebrate four decades of mosh mania

CONSIDER THIS: WHEN Anthrax formed in New York City on July 18, 1981, the average UK home price was a mere £20,268. In the 40 years that followed, the legendary thrashers – Joey Belladonna (vocals), Scott Ian and Jon Donais (guitars), Frank Bello (bass) and Charlie Benante (drums) – have released 11 studio albums, earned six Grammy nominations, sold millions of albums and toured the planet many times over. To celebrate their 40th anniversary, Anthrax announced a two-hour-plus livestream, though the set is actually pre-recorded. Why leave anything to chance when you can give fans a DVD-quality product with utterly phenomenal sound, high-definition video, compelling editing and zero hitches? This is precisely what we get.

Kicking off with *Fight 'Em 'Til You Can't*, they tear off at a frantic pace that never relents. You know it's a special set when we're three songs in and they're already at *Caught In A Mosh*. They intersperse five-alarm belters such as *Indians* and *I Am The Law* with deeper cuts like *Aftershock* and *Lone Justice*. In haughty defiance of the ageing process, Joey's performance would draw the envy of most 20-year-old vocalists, easily hitting the high notes and maintaining feverish energy throughout the entire set.

Periodically, various celebrities, including Jason Momoa, Gene Simmons, Rob Zombie and others deliver congratulatory videos. The livestream chat room buzzes with debate as to whether former vocalist John Bush will make an appearance but, unsurprisingly, that era is left unrepresented. However, a special guest turn from Public Enemy's Chuck D for *Bring The Noise* might well have yielded the best ever recorded version of that track. In fact, the entire 25-song set catches Anthrax at the very top of their game: tight as hell, energetic and delivering one slamming, horn-throwing, shout-'til-you're-hoarse banger after another. A suitably epic performance by one of the most important bands in metal history.

JOE DALY

ALUNAH
SATLAN
THE BLACK HEART, CAMDEN

We're days away from the full lifting of lockdown restrictions, and live music is tentatively creeping back into our lives. There may only be a few benches spaced out from each other in The Black Heart, but the atmosphere for openers **SATLAN** is one of legitimate excitement. The four-piece deal in a tremendously sludgy version of old-school heavy metal, but it's the wide-eyed and wailing performance of vocalist Soozi Chameleone that really captivates. Certainly, ones to watch. **ALUNAH** aren't a million miles away in style from the support, but are a tighter, tauter and more evolved act. They lack Satlan's instant visceral thrills, but their woozier, more psychedelic tendencies soar and drift through the venue seductively with, again, their own lead singer Sian Greenaway's Stevie Nicks-meets-early-Ozzy hybrid being the visual focal point of the set. Where Satlan aim at the jugular, Alunah take their time, often over a 10-minute-plus period, letting the pot bubble, before releasing the destructive power of their riffs and rattling the venue's foundations. Those in attendance might be sat down, but they bang their head with reckless abandon.

STEPHEN HILL

WREN
HELPLESS/AEROSOL JESUS
THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

It's been 489 days since The Black Heart last hosted a full-capacity show. While the venue hasn't fallen entirely silent in the interim, having hosted seated gigs, there's something incredibly liberating about seeing an actual crowd outside. Arriving amidst a squall of feedback, the tang of sweat and oppressive heat only enhances the apocalyptic atmosphere crafted by sludge nasties **AEROSOL JESUS**. Each song is nailed to a riff and given only the briefest glimpse of light in an effect that feels like Eyehategod smothering Scratch Acid. In a night of slow-burn intensity, **HELPLESS**'s blend of calamitous Converge-ish walls of noise with the abyssal void-gazing of post-metal feels like somebody kicked a hornet's nest and blasted it with napalm for good measure. There's a brief breather between walls of monolithic riffs before **WREN** arrive and we're plunged right back into the mire. Over a year from releasing *Groundswells*, Wren let loose like a tidal force, the ebb-and-flow of riffs sucking the crowd in before devouring it entirely. Whilst perhaps not a party band in the traditional sense, there are wall-to-wall grins as Wren bring miserabilism home to the sweaty club environment. It's good to be back.

RICH HOBSON

Babymetal beam down to their home planet

TAICHI NISHIMAKI

BABYMETAL

BUDOKAN, TOKYO

Su-metal and Moa Metal highlight 10 years of giddy glory

EVEN THE FOX God was blindsided by the pandemic. Tonight's stream, a 'director's cut' of songs from Babymetal's 10th anniversary, 10-date run at Tokyo's legendary Budokan venue, begins with a video message from him, delivered by a mysterious figure in a skeleton onesie: the year 2020 "turned into a state of dystopia" and took our voices, so instead of singing, the masked-up, socially distanced audiences must clap, stomp their feet and chant to fight against it. Luckily, they're up to the task.

As *Babymetal Death – Shin ver.* – blasts through the PA, Su-metal, Moa metal and their Avenger emerge strapped to elaborate crucifixes, before getting free and launching into a greatest hits set, each song enhanced by arena-busting theatrics and constant smiles. If joy could inoculate against COVID-19, their crowds would walk away immune.

Early on, the words "Give Me" flash up on the screens, as the robotic intro voice to *Gimme Chocolate!!* teases the words over and over, sparking a frenzy among the fans. *Doki Doki * Morning* is a rush, those dance routines still very impressive on their own, let alone accompanied by moving images under their feet, on an octagonal stage that's basically one giant screen. Bonus skeleton dancers come out for *GJ!* – perhaps a nod to their early days.

If there's a criticism, it's that the Kami Band rarely get a look-in. Usually positioned behind the girls, this time they're spread out below and around the stage, and only shown during specific solos or beats.

Su gets her moment in the spotlight for *No Rain, No Rainbow*, even playing a grand piano, and the remainder of the set shows how much she's grown into her star power. In the middle of *Megitsune* she struts like a badass and holds a silver mask against her face, later tossing it aside. During *Headbangeeeeerrrrr!!!!!*, she lifts up a mic stand as her bandmates and fans bow before her. After closer *Road Of Resistance*, she ceremoniously strikes 10 gongs. To finish, a video message tells us that the Metal Resistance has finally come to a close after a 10-year battle: could this be the end of Babymetal? Only the… well, you know the rest.

ELEANOR GOODMAN

MASTODON

GEORGIA AQUARIUM, ATLANTA

Atlanta's progressive riff-wielders take a deep, acoustic dive

"HONESTLY, I WAS a little nervous at first: 'I don't know about doing Mastodon acoustic, because we're such a heavy band,'" guitarist Bill Kelliher says in the preamble for the giants' first livestream. For most, that one shift – transforming metal maximalism into spaced-out psych/folk – would be enough, able to attract curious clicks.

However, we're dealing with Mastodon. When have they ever lived by others' standards? This is the quartet who've journeyed from sludge to progressive metal to hard rock, all while concocting concepts about Moby Dick and astral-projecting tsars. As a result, this isn't *just* an acoustic show; it's one filmed in an aquarium, with a set that's almost exclusively rarities. It might seem like they're throwing too many gimmicks at the wall, but, if you're thinking that, you clearly underestimate these Atlantean dynamos.

In softening, Mastodon only emphasise their experimentalism. Opener *Naked Burn* – formerly a chord-powered explosion – is now a complicated lyrical serenade, spotlighting Brann Dailor, Brent Hinds and Troy Sanders' ever-strengthening voices. Similarly, the 11-minute *Czar* becomes prog rock worthy of a Pink Floyd LP. The format's also used to preview coming attractions, as new song *Skeleton Of Splendor* debuts. The expanding ballad continues their recent rock tangent, with call-and-answer vocal lines that are as ghostly as they are memorable.

Mastodon deliver a set packed to the gills with rarities

The only chink in the armour is tonight's editing, as every track is preceded by interviews explaining its backstory. Although these sometimes lend insightful anecdotes (like *The Sparrow*'s sole lyric being the motto of a dead friend), they more frequently disrupt – as well as eliminate surprise from the setlist. Such interjections notwithstanding, Mastodon have woven captivation from a list of novelties. It makes a compelling argument for the four being at a creative peak, redefining their past while sowing excitement for tomorrow.

MATT MILLS

Mastodon: Cousteau-dians of the riff

PRESS

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FIVE MINUTES WITH LEE McKINNEY

BORN OF OSIRIS

The Born Of Osiris guitarist on aliens, podcasting and being the metalcore Danny Elfman

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

Morning, Lee. Who've you got there?
"It's my two dogs. I've got a cat too, but they aren't as social as these guys. I got Sniper, who is a Miniature Pinscher, and Lolly is kind of an odd mix of Shih Tzu and Shepherd. She's calm, he's hyper; he thinks he's a full-sized Doberman even though he's a 15-pound squirt. I've taken them out on tour a bit, but we get a bit too rowdy after the shows and I don't want them running off somewhere, but I have their faces on my guitar picks as a little 'I miss you!'"

No cat, though. They're pretty anti-social, right? Lot of people hate cats...
"Yeah, you don't get so many cuddles. I guess people need that from their animals, or they might have been scratched by a mean cat?"

Well, what were they doing to the cat to get scratched?
"This is true. Sounds like they might be the problem there, when I think about it."

You have written music for the *American Satan* movie and its spin-off TV show, *Paradise City*, which featured Ben Bruce from Asking Alexandria and Andy Biersack from Black Veil Brides among its cast. Are you the metalcore Danny Elfman?
"Oh fuck! Well, I am wishing to be now! Can we make that stick? Basically, it's about this band The Relentless, and, for the movie, I got the script before I knew who was in it, I just knew we were doing this arena metal, Mötley Crüe, Rob Zombie thing. But when the spin-off *Paradise City* came along, I got nothing. Because I sort of knew the recurring characters, I was able to tap into that a bit easier, but I had no idea who was going to be cast."

How was it when you saw those actors and musicians playing your songs?
"It was cool. I'm pretty picky so I had a bit of, 'He's not playing it right!', but I'm a big fan of the show *Entourage*, and there are a couple of guys from that, and I've always loved *Sons Of Anarchy*, and there were two guys from that as well. So it felt special to be a part of it, even more so."

"MY DOGS' FACES ARE ON MY GUITAR PICKS"

So, as a white man in his 30s, are you legally obligated to have a podcast?
"Ha ha! It'd seem so, wouldn't it? You'd think with Born Of Osiris's following I'd be able to eat that up, but it's still a small community. A lot of my podcast [Infinite Mind] is just answering questions for people, but after I record, I feel lighter. I will look back and think about what I've been speaking about and go, 'Woah, I didn't know I needed to get that off my chest!' I'm not trying to go deep, but if it means something to the kids who listen to it, that's a win."

If you had a dollar for every time someone mispronounced the name of your band, how many dollars would you have?
"Quite a few. I've had two today, and that's from four interviews. But there was one dude who said he'd never heard the band until he was offered the interview a week ago, and now he's a fan. So I can't be mad."

Your new album is called *Angel Or Alien*. Which is more likely to exist?
"Aliens. As far as I know we haven't reached the end of the universe, so my thought is, 'What makes us so special?' As for religion, there have been so many [religions], what makes anyone think that theirs is just the fucking one? This is not, 'Fuck your god!', death metal shit, but I just don't know."

Sound logic. What do these aliens look like then?
"Not too different from us. Actually I'm not sure, there are probably different laws over there and they have different breathing apparatus. I'd say they have four limbs... but why? It all depends on the law of their planet."

So, humans that breathe through their nipples with loads of limbs? Could happen. What's that you're drinking?
"Just water."

You can only drink one thing ever again, what you drinking?
"Probably water."

Okay, water and one other drink.
"I'm gonna say whiskey, because I feel it can serve multiple purposes. Not the most high calorie thing either. Plus, as I get older my hangovers kill me, so I'd want something to sip, just on ice."

Class act.
"Thank you, man."

***ANGEL OR ALIEN* IS OUT NOW VIA SUMERIAN**

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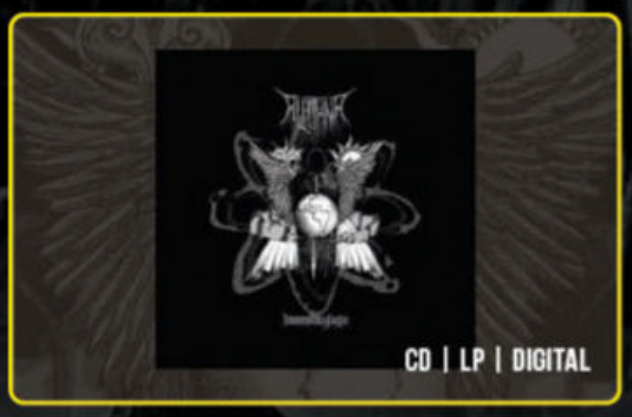

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